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Vol. II.

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Ferret, the Little Detective: or, The Man of Many Faces. By POLICE CAPTAIN HOWARD.



Halley sprang on the bridge, and dashed after the detective and his prisoner; seizing his revolver by the barrel, he raised it on high, and after placing himself near the detective, in several noiseless bounds, he brought it down on Ferret's head with fearful violence.

Ferret, the Little Detective; or, The Man of Many Faces.

By POLICE CAPTAIN HOWARD.

CHAPTER I.

THE MURDER.

EXCITEMENT ran high in the village of Fordham one morning, when it became noised abroad that old Squire Beebe had been found by his housekeeper dead in his bed, and covered with the blood which had flown from an ugly knife wound in his side.

That he had been murdered was plain to be seen; but by whom? Nobody could even conjecture, for old Squire Beebe, except for the company of his housekeeper, an old, grizzled woman named Betsey, had lived entirely alone for long years in the past; he had lived the life of a hermit nearly; visitors never went to the big house on the hill, and he seldom left it; of relatives, the villagers supposed generally that he had none, yet some among them remembered the fact that in by-gone years, a sister had lived with the squire for several years before his marriage to a fair woman; then the sister left; for two years the squire and his wife lived happily and then she died, since which time the old man had lived the life of a recluse.

The news of the murder was flashed along the telegraph wires to the city of New York, and Hank Dechaz and Bob Barron, two detectives, were soon on the spot surveying the house and grounds, the body, and the room where it had been discovered in all its ghastly bloodiness.

Hank Dechaz was the older of the detectives, and was tall and sparely built, with brownish-red eyes, sandy hair and whiskers; he was of a French father and an American mother, and was known as an experienced and shrewd detective.

Bob Barron, his companion, was light complexioned, with brown hair and blue eyes, and known as a skillful man in the ferreting out of crime and criminals.

Carefully did they examine the house and grounds, only to acknowledge after the conclusion of the search that they had not been able to find the slightest clew to the murderer.

As might have been expected, people flocked from far and near to the place of the bloody scene, and hanging about the grounds, waited the possible development of another act in the dreadful drama.

Among those of the number who appeared most inquisitive, and somewhat given to prying about, was a little stumpy German with light blue eyes and flaxen hair. He seemed to be unacquainted with anybody, and yet, with the freedom which such affairs gives people, he spoke to one and then another of the crowd, his remarks being nearly always addressed to elderly men, or men whose appearance indicated wealth and position in society.

"Mein Gott!" he ejaculated, speaking at an elderly gentleman near by. "Isn't dose things dreadful?"

"It certainly is," was the somewhat quizzical reply of the gentleman, as he eyed the German somewhat closely.

"Yah, dot ish sol!" said the foreigner. "Dot ish sol! Hatt der kilt mens anyfoi you call—relatives?"

"Not that I know of."

"Well, dot ish very bad," and the little pussy German moved away, only to renew his inquiries in a few minutes of another person.

He maneuvered for some time to gain admission to the house, and finally accomplished his purpose; the first thing he did was to visit the room in which the body, which had not yet been disturbed, was lying; only the housekeeper was present, and she at once eyed him suspiciously.

"Mine goot vomans, vill you be so kind to get me a little water?" the German asked.

"What for?"

"I wants to vash the gentlemens; I bees der undertaker."

With her doubts somewhat at rest, Betsey left the room on the mission given her.

No sooner was she out of sight than the German commenced a quick examination of the room; he found nothing whatever, until approaching the bed he lifted the body; with a quick exclamation he snatched something

from beneath where the body had been lying and quickly hid it in his pocket.

Hardly had this been done when Betsey entered, in company with Dechaz and Barron.

"Who are you?" demanded Dechaz.

"De undertaker," replied the German.

"Who sent for you?"

"Nobodys."

"Then get out of here lively, or I'll take you in custody," said Dechaz, in grim tones.

"Yah, if mynbeer wants it," said the little German, bowing obsequiously; then turning around he left the room and house, and joined the crowd once more: he asked no further questions, but a smile played about his lips in strong contrast to the stolidity his face had expressed before entering the house.

For a short time longer he remained outside, and then turning on his heel, he walked away.

Before nightfall there came to Fordham in hot haste a young man of about twenty-five years of age, calling himself Bernard Haley, and claiming to be the nephew of Squire Beebe, and, therefore, entitled to take possession of all the murdered man's property and effects.

To the questions put to him by Judge Grant, who had arrived at the spot, he gave straightforward and conclusive replies, and exhibited undeniable proofs of his personality.

Haley at once took charge of affairs, and calling in the undertaker of Fordham, his uncle's body was prepared for the grave, while a simple slab of marble was ordered, bearing Squire Beebe's name and age.

Two days later the funeral took place, the body being followed to the grave by a vast concourse, among whom was noticeable a little man, with cold black eyes and hair, and dressed in a suit of black cloth.

From the moment of Bernard Haley's leaving the house, the eyes of the little man in black remained fixed upon him; at the grave the man in black crowded forward until he stood within a few feet of Haley.

The service over, the coffin was lowered, and as Haley was bending over the grave, and the first clod of earth fell, there floated to his ears the most indistinct of whispers:

"Murderer!"

Giving a great start, Haley glanced about him, and gave each person near him a scrutinizing look, while his own face grew pale and a troubled look began to appear on it; with an inward "pshaw!" he recovered his composure and turned from the grave.

The eyes of the little man in black fairly sparkled and danced as he witnessed Haley's trepidation of manner, and he muttered something under his breath.

Joined by Dechaz, Haley left the grounds, and entering his carriage, returned to the house.

The man in black wended his way to the village in a thoughtful frame of mind, and entering the bar-room of the principal hotel, he threw himself into a chair, and taking out a newspaper, commenced reading, or at least it would appear so to a casual observer, but in reality he was listening to the conversation of a group of men near him, who, from talking of the mysterious murder, drifted into a conversation regarding a gang of counterfeiters whose headquarters were supposed to be located in Westchester County.

While listening to their conversation a newcomer entered, and from his manner it was evident that he had something to tell.

"Heard the news?" he queried.

"No. What's up?" asked half a dozen.

"They've jugged one of the counterfeiters at last."

"Forestalled!" muttered the man in black in a chagrined tone of voice.

"The devil you say!" ejaculated several of the loungers.

"Yes; they caught him this morning trying to pass a counterfeit bill; so they arrested him and clapped him into jail."

"I must see that man!" said the man in black, mentally, to himself.

Listening further he learned all the particulars of the affair, during the recital of which Dechaz and Haley entered; as they heard

the news, they exchanged significant glances, which did not escape the notice of the man in black, who at once fell to eying them closely.

Tom Dechaz and Haley left the place, followed shortly after by the mysterious little personage, who did not halt until they had disappeared in the house; then muttering:

"I've struck the trail at last!" he faced about and returned to the hotel.

CHAPTER II.

THE WORKSHOP.

ONCE outside of the saloon, Haley angrily exclaimed:

"Hang the luck anyhow, Dechaz, what's to be done?"

"I don't know."

"Can't you suggest any way in which to get Jack out of limbo?"

"No."

"Thunder, we must do something, for Jack is the only man we have who can handle the pen. Without him our work will be useless."

"Suppose you see the rest of the boys. Perhaps they can see a way out of the present difficulty."

"So I will. I'll see them this very night. Barron has gone back to the city, hasn't he?"

"Yes; I sent him back this morning."

"Then suppose you go with me?"

"All right!"

By this time they had reached the house, which they at once entered, unaware that their footsteps had been dogged by the little man in black.

Had the latter personage remained in the vicinity of the house instead of returning to the hotel, he might that night have learned something that caused him afterward many a narrow escape, and drew him into many a thrilling adventure.

He had no more than reached the hotel, when Dechaz and Haley left the house in charge of Betsey, and proceeded to the stable; Haley's horse was brought out and hitched before a buggy, which they at once entered; they soon were beyond the confines of the village, and speeding towards the open country; they drove rapidly and soon were within sight of the Bronx river, which they skirted for some distance; then taking a sharp bend they entered a little used road which penetrated into a woods.

They went but a mile or so when they came in sight of a long, low, rambling-looking farmhouse, before the door of which they drew rein; their approach had evidently been heard, for a door opened and a man stepped outside.

"Is that you, Jerry?" Haley asked.

"Yes."

"Then take care of my horse, but don't unharness him."

"All right."

"Are the boys all here?"

"Yes, all but Jack Dugan," was the reply.

Without further words, Haley and Dechaz entered the house, where they were confronted by a frowzy, evil-looking hag, whose breath was redolent of bad whisky, and who hiccupped out the greeting:

"How do, Cap'n Haley?"

"Very well, Mag," replied Haley, in a conciliating tone. "How do you do?"

"Much same's usual," she brokenly said.

"That's a fact," muttered Haley, "for I never saw you sober."

Crossing the apartment, Haley stooped and raised a trap-door, revealing a pair of stairs leading to a cellar below. They descended at once into the dense darkness, closing the door behind them; everything was still as death, save for a gentle clicking, which now and then reached their ears; going to the opposite side of the cellar, Haley gave a peculiar rap in a certain spot in the wall, which was answered a few minutes later by the opening before them of a door, which swung inward toward the inner apartment, and through which came a flood of light.

Dechaz and Haley at once crossed the threshold, after which the door was closed; the room was long and narrow, and its sides and ceiling were of boards; ranged alongside of the room

was a long, counter-like structure, at which were seated five men in their shirt sleeves; they had been hard at work and desisted only when the commotion due to the entrance of the new comers aroused them.

"How are you, cap?" was the salutation Haley received from each of the men. "Anything new?"

"Yes, bad news."

"Bad news?" they cried, jumping to their feet in a state of excitement. "What's wrong?"

"Jack is in limbo."

"The devil you say?" ejaculated one. "Then our cake is all dough."

"Unless we can get him out of limbo," said another.

"But how?" asked a third.

"Yes," interrupted Haley, "that's exactly what I am here to find out. How are we to get Jack Dugan out of the clutches of the detectives?"

Various plans were suggested and summarily disposed of as unfeasible; but at last after much argument, it was decided to get a female member of the gang to go to the jail where Jack was confined, ask to see him, give him her clothing and aid him to escape.

"Pshaw!" objected one, "the keeper must certainly tumble to the racket, unless he's a fool—"

"Or a knave," interrupted Haley, "which he undoubtedly is. I'll look after him and see that a little dust floats into his eyes."

"That is—you'll see him."

"Yes."

"Good enough. And now to lay the wires. What's first to be done?"

"You, Tom Clawson, must go to the city by the earliest train, and after finding Kate you must inform her what is wanted of her. She must go to the jail dressed in deep mourning with a heavy crape veil over her face. Once inside, Jack must put on her dress and veil and pass out in her stead. And have her tell him that we will wait for him at Bloomingdale bridge with a boat; that will make it necessary for him to walk two miles along the road, and tell him to be very careful."

"But how about Kate—won't they keep her shut up?"

"No, they cannot do that, as several have escaped just that way and they never did anything to the women."

"All right," replied Tom Clawson. "I'm off at once for the depot to catch the owl train. Any further instructions?"

"No."

"Well, then, so long," he said, and slipping on his coat he disappeared into the cellar of the farmhouse and started for the railway station.

"And you, Dechaz," resumed Haley, "had better see the jail-keeper. Fix him if you can; here's the money to do it," and he handed the detective a large roll of bank bills.

"Genuine or queer?" asked Dechaz.

"Good," was the reply.

"All right, I'll do as you say. To-morrow morning will answer, I suppose?"

"Yes."

And the wires for Jack's release having been laid and being all in order for pulling when the proper time arrived, the engravers set to work again, while the detective and Haley sought the upper regions, a bed, and rest.

At daybreak they were awakened by Jerry, and once up, Dechaz was ready to start on his mission.

By ten o'clock he was at the jail, asking permission to see Jack Dugan.

"Can't do it!" growled the keeper.

"Yes, you can," said Dechaz.

"Well, then, I won't," was the surly reply

"Don't be so fast," said the detective, and exhibiting his badge, he asked, "will you respect this?"

"Oh!" and the keeper's eyes opened, "then it's all right; yes, you may come in," and he opened the barred gate, admitting the detective. "You see," he added, by way of apology, "the fellow's a little slippery, and if he got away it would be a bad job for me."

"Why, what would happen?"

"Not anything much that I know of; I might be discharged, but I wouldn't lose much," and he shrugged his shoulders.

"Then you don't get a fat salary?"

"Not at all."

"Pretty hard times, too?"

"Yes."

"Don't you ever make a spec?"

The keeper looked nervously around, as if afraid of having the conversation overheard, then facing Dechaz again, he muttered:

"Nary a spec. It's never come in my way."

The closing remark informed the detective that the keeper was ripe for a betrayal of his trust, and he at once drew the roll of bills from his pocket, at the sight of which the keeper's eyes watered.

"Would you like to make a spec?" the detective asked, flourishing the bills enticingly before his eyes.

"By doing what?" he gasped.

"Listen to me. You have a certain Jack Dugan confined here, whom you are to guard carefully?"

"Yes."

"Well, a woman in deep black comes to see him, and you in your goodness of heart allow her to enter."

"Yes."

"Say, twenty minutes later, you call for the woman, and conduct her to the door, not being at all suspicious, and never asking her to remove the veil which covers her features. Can you do it?"

"Yes."

"And restrain your curiosity to peer under the veil?"

"Yes."

"Then this roll of bills is yours," and Dechaz extended his hand.

Like a wolf seizing on his prey the keeper grabbed the bills, and quickly hid them away in his pocket.

"I will go in and see Dugan now, myself," said Dechaz, "if you will be kind enough to lead the way."

Five minutes later he was in Jack Dugan's cell.

"How are you, Jack, my boy?"

"Ha! Dechaz, is that you?" he said, gloomily.

"Yes. Nabbed, I see."

"Yes, hang the luck. What's to be done?"

"Get out."

"How?"

And then the detective gave him a long account of the expected visit of Kate, whose clothing he was to assume, and then trudge along the road to Bloomingdale bridge, where his companions in crime were to meet him.

His gloomy manner disappeared, and Jack became quite jolly at the thought of a speedy good-bye to his incarceration, and as Dechaz arose to go, he said:

"If the jailer keeps his promise you'll find me at the bridge on time."

After a parting word or two with the keeper, Dechaz left the jail, and going to the station, took the train for New York.

It was late in the afternoon that, according to arrangement, a woman dressed in deep mourning appeared at the jail gate, and asked for admission.

"Who do you wish to see?"

"My brother, Jack Dugan," was the reply of Kate.

"You can't stay long, it's late now."

"I don't want to stay more than a few minutes," was the reply.

"All right," said the jailer, and Kate was allowed to enter, after which she was conducted to the cell occupied by Jack Dugan.

Once inside the cell, and free from observation, Kate said:

"Here, Jack, now get to work, and put on my dress and veil."

In a very short space of time the change was made, and as they were nearly of a height the dress was not a bad fit.

A few minutes later the jailer appeared, with the remark:

"Closing-up time, madame, you must go."

"Very well," Kate replied, "I'm ready," and she gave Dugan a gentle forward push.

"Come on, then, lively," said the jailer, in nervous tones.

Without more ado Jack followed him through the corridors, and out to the gate, through which he passed; it was locked behind him, and he was a free man again.

With an exultant chuckle, he cast one last look at the jail, then turned on his heel, and strode away with a queer walk for a woman.

CHAPTER III.

HENRY BEEBE DECKER.

THE second day after the burial of the murdered man, a youth of about twenty years of age strolled into Fordham.

His manner and the cut of his clothing showed him to be a hard-working lad, and his presence was explained by his visiting several stores and shops and asking for work.

"My name is Decker," he said; "I am from New York, where I have been working regularly until two months ago. I tried all over New York but could get no work, so I came to the country hoping to meet with better success."

But Fordham offered him no employment whatever, and with discouraged heart he turned away and strolled outside the town; his road lay past the cemetery, which looked so green and pretty that he could not pass; he turned into the gate and with slow steps walked up and down the narrow paths that separated the dead.

Finally he reached the place where was the new-made grave.

Listlessly he glanced at the marble slab, and then starting a little, he bent forward and examined it more closely.

The headstone bore the inscription:

"HENRY BEEBE,
Died, aged 71."

"That's queer," muttered the young lad. "Henry Beebe, my own name; can it mean anything? But no, how foolish I am. Simply because I never knew my father and mother I am drawn into all sorts of odd fancies. Henry Beebe Decker is my name, and yet who am I named for? Mrs. Garrity never told me that."

Torn by confusing reflections, the lad threw himself on the ground beside the grave, and lay quietly there for some time, buried in thought; then rising, he muttered:

"Pshaw! What a fool I am to let such a little thing upset me. I must tramp along in search of work."

Leaving the cemetery he took the road again and trudged wearily onward, stopping here and there to ask for work, only to be each time refused.

* * * * *

The little man in black went directly to bed after reaching the hotel, and slept soundly until the next morning.

After he had breakfasted he strolled through the village, stopping in several stores on various improvised errands, in each one making it a point to ask if counterfeit bills had ever been shoved on them; of those who had thus suffered he obtained descriptions of the men who had passed the bills.

He kept this up all the morning, but at dinner-time returned to the hotel; after the meal had been eaten he retired to his room, shortly afterward appearing dressed in a rough costume, much the worse for wear.

To the clerk he said:

"Don't let any one enter my room before my return."

The room having been paid for in advance, the clerk replied:

"Very well, sir; it shall be as you wish."

Leaving the hotel, the little man took the main street, and following it steadily, was soon in the country.

It was by this time well along in the afternoon, and by the time that he reached Blooming valley darkness was beginning to settle over the landscape, and the moon had already begun rising above the horizon.

But he kept plodding steadily onward, pausing not, until the rapid fall of horse's feet struck on his ear; nearer they approached and then the rider came in sight.

Seeing the little man, he drew rein, and quickly asked:

"Have you met a woman lately on the road?"

"No!" was the reply. "Why?"

"I am the sheriff of the county," was the rapid explanation of the horseman; "just visiting the jail, I found that the jailer had been fooled, and that a counterfeiter had escaped in the garb of a woman. Are you sure you did not meet him?"

"Yes," was the answer, "I am sure I did not pass either man or woman, unless he or she were concealed in the brush by the roadside."

"I will go on anyhow," said the sheriff, after a moment's hesitation, and chucking up his steed he dashed away.

"The devil!" muttered the mysterious personage, "I'm afraid my cake is all dough again. Shall I go on, or go back?"

After musing several minutes he decided to go ahead, and with quick step pressed onward, and not long afterward he came in sight of Bloomingdale bridge; as he drew near it, he saw approaching from the opposite direction, the figure of a woman; quickly he took in her make-up, and his heart bounded high as he noticed a certain awkwardness in her gait and carriage; he scanned her from top to toe; her face was covered by a long black veil that defied all scrutiny, yet he exulted in the knowledge that he was face to face with Jack Dugan.

"The devil!" ejaculated the disguised counterfeiter, "I shall have to pass on and return to the bridge."

As he muttered the words, he stepped on his end of the bridge, as the little man did the same on the other; Dugan's toe struck an uneven plank, and in endeavoring to save himself, his skirts were flung up, disclosing a pair of boots and pants.

"Ha—ha!" muttered the mysterious little man. Ferret, now's your chance; brace up and take him prisoner."

Each approached the other with an air of seeming indifference, but the moment they were opposite, Ferret bounded quickly to the counterfeiter's side, and flung back the veil, disclosing, as he had anticipated, the bearded features of a

"Halt!" said Ferret. "Jack Dugan, I know you. You are my prisoner."

"The devil you say!" was the cool reply, as clenching his fist, Dugan made a ferocious pass at the detective's head.

Ferret leaped nimbly aside, thus avoiding the blow; and the next instant he jerked out a revolver, and cocking it, presented it point-blank at the counterfeiter's head.

"Surrender quietly, or you'll rue it!" sternly said Ferret.

Dugan's lower jaw fell, his hands fell listlessly to his sides, while his eyes went roving around in search of those who were to meet him at the very spot.

A noise in the rear of Ferret attracted his attention, and glancing that way, his face suddenly lighted up, for peering above the side of the bridge, he saw the faces of his companions in crime.

Lying under the bridge in their boat, Haley and his men had heard what passed between Ferret and Dugan, and when they heard the ominous click of the detective's revolver, they hastily arose to their feet, and poking their heads above the level of the bridge, took in the scene.

Ferret heard the noise of the movement, and intuitively knew that others were near; that they were directly behind him, yet he dared not take his eyes off of Dugan to turn around.

Were they friends or foes? What course should he follow?

"Ha-ha!" cried Dugan, "your game is up, my cove; look behind you."

The sight would have caused even brave Ferret's blood to run cold, for glaring vindictively at him above the edge of the bridge, with cocked revolvers aimed at him, were Haley and his worthy associates in evil.

Quick to think and act, Ferret took a quick forward step, clasped Dugan by the shoulder, and started him off the bridge on a fast walk, with the cold muzzle of a revolver back of his ear, and the sternly spoken words:

"Keep quiet, or by the God above us, I'll make dog meat of you!"

Dreading the result that might follow the discharge of his revolver, Haley sprang on the bridge, and dashed after the detective and his prisoner; seizing his revolver by the barrel, he raised it on high, and after placing himself near the detective, in several noiseless bounds, he brought it down on Ferret's head with fearful violence.

With a groan, Ferret's hold on Dugan weakened, and he fell into a heap in the roadway, half unconscious; but quickly rousing himself, he raised to his elbow, aimed at Haley, and fired; the bullet whizzed past within an eighth of an inch of Haley's head, cutting a furrow in his hair.

With a curse, the captain of the counterfeiters sprang forward, and once more struck Ferret a heavy blow on the head, which deprived him of consciousness.

"Here, Dugan," cried Haley, "lend a hand, and we'll chuck this fellow overboard."

Dugan sprang forward to do his master's bidding; picking up the unconscious Ferret, they carried him to the side of the bridge.

"Hurry up!" cried one of those in the boat; "here comes somebody."

"Now!" cried Haley, and giving the body a toss, it went flying into space, and dropped with a splash into the running water.

"To the boat!" cried Haley, and leading the way he sprang into the little craft, closely followed by Dugan; those at the oars at once gave way, and the tide and oars combined caused the boat to almost fly; a dark object floated near them, which one of the rowers gave a vicious dig

with his oar; it was the body of Ferret, the little detective.

"Faster!" cried Haley, "faster! There's somebody on the bridge now."

The newcomer who had approached on a run, stood there panting for breath. He saw the rapidly vanishing boat, and gasped out in breathless tones:

"Too late! My God, what fearful deed has been enacted?"

He glanced quickly about him, ran hurriedly around the bridge, but seeing nothing, he turned to one side and started rapidly down the bank of the stream in pursuit of the fugitives.

"Help!"

He heard the cry, delivered in tones weak and faint, paused and listened.

"Help, for God's sake; help or I perish!" again came the appealing cry whose tones curdled his very blood.

CHAPTER IV.

FERRET'S LIFE IS SAVED.

WHEN thrown from the bridge, Ferret's body by a fortunate accident struck and lodged crosswise on a log which was floating down stream.

The chill of the water soon established a sort of semi-consciousness and he distinctly felt the blow of the oar as it struck and dislodged him from the log; instinctively he struggled to keep afloat, and began feebly swimming for shore, whose location his bewildered senses failed to perceive.

He heard the sounds of the oars in the rowlocks grow faint in the distance, and knew that his enemies had gone; it was then he raised his first cry for help, scarce more than half divining the nearness of a human being.

A moment later he repeated his cry, adding:

"Help me, or I perish!"

"Courage, old boy," came back the reply. "I'll be with you in a minute."

Stripping off his coat and shoes the newcomer plunged into the water, and struck out for the spot where in the now gathered darkness of night, he saw faintly outlined the struggling form of the wounded man.

A few lusty strokes placed the young fellow by Ferret's side; and seizing the detective by the collar with one hand the swimmer started slowly shoreward; Ferret had sufficient presence of mind left not to hamper or impede his rescuer's movements any more than he could possibly help.

Giving himself completely up, Ferret soon found himself nearing the shore, on which he was drawn; he tried to rise to his feet, but his rescuer kindly said:

"No—no, lie still a little while and get your breath."

Ferret obeyed like a child does its mother's command.

In fifteen minutes the detective was something near his usual self, and turning to the young fellow, he said:

"I'll get up now with your help."

"All right," was the reply, as Ferret was helped to his feet.

"Who are you?" was the detective's abrupt query, a few moments later.

"Henry Beebe Decker," answered the young fellow.

"Henry Beebe Decker," repeated Ferret. "Any relation to Squire Beebe, of Fordham?"

"Not that I know of," was the answer. "But now, who are you? How came you in the plight in which I found you?"

"I was knocked on the head by a couple of fellows, and thrown off the bridge."

"And then they left in a row boat?" interrogatively said Henry.

"Yes, I believe so," was the cautious reply of the detective. "Which way did they do?"

"Down stream."

"Ah! well, I'm very much obliged for your kind services, but I'm feeling quite well now, except for a severe pain in my head, and must now separate from you. I can't tell you who I am, but my brave boy, we'll meet again. Good-by," and after taking Henry's hand and shaking it warmly, the detective faced about and followed the course of the stream, with slow steps, for he had recovered from the effects of the fearful blows in but small degree.

Henry stood still, and saw the form of Ferret swallowed up in the darkness; he felt a little hurt at the want of confidence in him expressed by one who owed so much to him, and yet he could not but feel that Ferret's few words of thanks came right from his heart; standing there, he propounded the mental query:

"What shall I do?"

For some time he remained undecided, and then gave vent to his thoughts in muttering:

"It is evident that he is following enemies far too powerful for him to cope with, in his present weak condition, at any rate. I saved his life, have not I the right to guard over it for a while? And besides, hungry and destitute as I am, I surely have a right to follow him and appeal to his generosity."

Thinking this, he too followed the winding course of the stream, although not going fast enough to overtake Ferret, who, kept up by his indomitable pluck and strength of will, went stumbling onward in the darkness.

He went blindly forward until the first gleams of the approaching day began to appear on the horizon; by the light Ferret saw a little clearing, in the center of which stood a small farm-house.

Toward this he directed his flagging steps; as he stepped up to the front door, it opened to allow egress to the hard-fisted, early-rising farmer, who at the sight of the wet, bedraggled figure with bruised, bloody, hatless head, started back in amazement, exclaiming:

"Great Heaven, man, what's the matter with you?"

"Nothing much," was Ferret's reply. "I'm just a little weak and exhausted, and would like to get something to eat and a place to sleep for a few hours."

The farmer hesitated about introducing into his household such a rough-looking specimen of humanity, whom evidently he thought to be a tramp who had got into some difficulty.

Guessing his thoughts, Ferret said:

"You can make yourself easy as to my character, I am able and willing to pay for my accommodation."

"Well, come in," said the farmer, a little reluctantly, leading the way to the kitchen, in whose broad fireplace a fire had already been lighted.

Before the genial heat of the wood fire Ferret at once placed himself, and his only partially dry clothes began to steam.

"I'll be back in a minute," said the farmer, going out of the kitchen for the purpose of telling his wife not to enter it as a strange man was there.

Coming back he passed the front door only to see standing in it another straggler, who was none other than Henry Beebe Decker.

"Halloo!" ejaculated the farmer, astonished at his second early visit, "what do you want?"

"Something to eat."

"Well, come in; I suppose it might as well be the whole hog or none," he added, to himself, in an under tone.

Ferret glanced up as his host entered, and his eyes encountered those of Henry.

"You here?" he said, significantly.

"Yes," replied Henry. "What of it?"

"Nothing, only—" and Ferret came close to him, and said, in a stern whisper, "don't attempt to dog my footsteps. You saved my life, I am your debtor for that, but don't dog me or try to pry into my affairs if you have any regard for your health. You followed me here, didn't you?"

"Yes," boldly answered Henry.

"For what purpose?"

"For this; I have been tramping around the country in search of work for weeks; I found none; yesterday I spent the last penny I had for a meal; I followed you, thinking that you cared enough for the service I had done to give me the means wherewith to purchase at least enough to keep me one day."

Ferret eyed the young fellow sharply for several minutes, and satisfied of the honesty of his words, said:

"Excuse my negligence. Here is some money for you; take it."

Henry accepted the money with many thanks, and then turning to the wondering husbandman, said:

"Get me something to eat as quickly as possible, for I'm half starved."

Breakfast was soon placed before them, and right well did they demolish the pile of edibles put on the table.

After finishing their meal, Ferret and Harry were shown to a room containing a bed; on this both at once cast themselves, and it was not long before both were sound asleep.

How long Henry slept he knew not, but when he awoke he saw that night was again drawing near; at first he could hardly realize where he was; then, after a moment's thought, he remembered all the occurrences of the night before.

He turned over in bed, expecting to find his strange companion by his side, but looked—to find him gone.

It seemed to Henry like some dream, but yet it was not, he knew; the strange little man had come into his life like a flash, had wrapped himself in mystery and disappeared.

And filled with curiosity, he muttered:

"Hang it. Who was he?"

CHAPTER V.

BACK TO THE SHOP.

"It was a good thing, cap, that you were at the bridge to meet me," said Jack Dugan, after the boat was fairly under way, and the body of Ferret had been dashed aside by one of the cars.

"Yes," was Haley's reply. "Did you get a good look at the fellow?"

"Middling."

"What kind of a looking person was he?"

"Rather short and slender, dark complexioned, black eyes and hair; that is as near as I can recollect."

"What do you suppose he is—a detective?"

"That is my impression."

"It's too bad we didn't go through him before chucking him off the bridge, then we would have known beyond doubt."

"It makes but little difference, though," said Dugan, "for he is food for fishes, safe enough."

"True," said Haley, "I had not thought of that."

"By jingo!" sadder'y ejaculated Dugan.

"What is the matter?" queried Haley.

"I have an idea."

"Well."

"He was a detective, and most likely on his

way to the jail to try and pump me, or some thing of the kind, else why should he have noticed me so closely and jerked up the veil? It shows that he is up to snuff."

"I believe you are right, and yet," and Haley mused a minute ere adding, "I don't see why he would have any object in coming to see you, for Dechaz says that no detective has been detailed to visit us up here; in fact, our presence in this region is not at all suspected at headquarters in New York."

"Well, then, I can't understand it," said Dugan, after which came a silence of some length, during which Haley's mind ran back over the incidents of the few preceding days; the train of thought carried him to the house of his uncle, to the grave-yard, and beside the yawning grave; in fancy he heard repeated the ringing, accusing word, "murderer;" then imagination pictured the faces impressed on his memory when he cast that swift glance at those about him, and the features of one stood out prominently, that of a little, dark-featured man dressed in black; he saw the face in imagination, a sickening sensation flooded his breast, and his heart beat tumultuously, while his breath came short and quick.

"What is the matter?" asked Dugan, noticing his agitation.

He groaned out an unintelligible answer, while these thoughts ran through his mind:

"The little man in black whom I saw at the funeral, and the detective who tried to arrest Dugan, are one and the same person. Great God! who is he? Does he really know my secret?"

"What is the matter, man?" again asked Jack Dugan, taking Haley by the shoulder, and shaking him a little.

"The detective—" and here the captain of the counterfeiters halted.

"What of him? He won't bother us any more. He's deader'n a door-nail."

"Is he?" queried Haley, in a sort of dazed way.

"Yes; of course."

"To be sure," said Haley. "I do remember," and he gave a deep sigh of relief at the thought that the man he feared was no longer in the land of the living.

On through the darkness the little craft went speeding, and rapidly the counterfeiters approached their headquarters, or, as they more frequently termed it—the workshop.

The boat was beached and drawn under cover about half a mile distant from the workshop, in the small hours of the morning. Haley sat down, drew out pencil and paper, and by the light of a bull's eye lantern he wrote:

"HENRY DECHAZ, Police Headquarters,
New York.

"Come up at once. Answer. H."

This message Haley at once dispatched by one of the men to a near-by telegraph station, giving the bearer instructions to send the same as soon as the office was opened in the morning, and wait for a reply.

This arranged, the remainder started for the workshop, where they soon arrived.

As usual, the long, low house looked dark and silent, black and deserted, but a peculiar knock on the door was quickly answered by its opening for them; it was Jerry who appeared, and his first words were:

"Have ye got Jack wi' ye?"

"Yes," replied that person, "I'm back again, safe and sound."

"An' ye bilked the coppers?"

"Yes."

"Well, come in, all of ye," and he stepped aside and allowed the party to enter.

"Now, b'ys," said Jerry, "let's all take a sup of sumthin' warum," and going to a closet he

produced a large black bottle, whose label pronounced it to be rye whiskey; glasses were also produced, and nothing loth, each one of the party poured out a good stiff horn.

Just as Jerry was pouring out a drink for himself, there came from an inner room a querulous call:

"Jerry—Jerry!"

His face clouded with anger, and he called back:

"Shut up, and go to sleep!"

"Go to—hic—blazes!" grumbled a maudlin voice; then came a thump as of a person tumbling out of bed, and a minute later, big Mag came reeling into the room in a state of half undress, so intoxicated as to be almost unable to stand.

Her bloodshot orbs ran around the party, and she saw the preparations for drinking, which fact grieved her sorely, as was evidenced by her words:

"Ain't you—hic—shamed of—hic—yersel's, for—hic—drinkin' 'thout—hic—notic'n' me?" and she winked and blinked in a reproving manner. "Yer looks 'shamed, I see, zo—hic—fill up anuzzer glass—hic—for me."

There was no help for it, and a glass was handed the woman which she filled to the very brim, and then getting the middle of her back against the edge of the door jamb so as to steady herself, she poised her glass and waited for the signal to toss it off; while waiting she chanced to get a glimpse of Dugan, and at once cried:

"Shack—is that you—hic—?"

"Yes," was the reply of Dugan, smiling at her condition.

"Glad to zee—hic—you back. Here's to hic—you, Shack—," and without standing longer on ceremony, she put the glass to her lips, and in two swallows put the fiery liquid safely out of sight.

"Fill 'em—hic—up again!" she cried, with maudlin accent.

"No," said Jerry, sharply, "you sha'n't ha' no more."

"Guesh yer right, Sherry—hic," muttered Mag. "Guesh yer right; I'm goin'—hic—boys; au revoir—hic," and waving her hand in a most comical way, the drunken dame disappeared with a long, rolling step; a minute or so later came a squeaking as she deposited herself plumply on the bed, and this was quickly followed by a loud snoring, as she sank into alcoholic stupidity, for sleep it could hardly be called, so thoroughly was her system saturated with the great quantities of liquor she drank.

The counterfeiters, after drinking several glasses each of the whiskey, arose and signified their intention of turning in. At one end of the room was a door leading into another apartment; going to this, Haley opened it, and they all followed him in; the room was well fitted up, and arranged around the wall were ten low cots.

Upon these the tired men stretched themselves without delay, and it was not long ere they fell asleep.

The only wakeful one of the lot was Haley, and he found it impossible to sleep for some time, as there seemed seared on his brain the figure of a little man with dark features, and dressed in black, whose lips seemed constantly moving and forming the word: "Murderer!"

At his first beams had struck into the room through a crack in the wooden shutter, before sleep visited his eyelids.

Once asleep, he did not wake until a hand was placed on his shoulder, and a voice cried:

"Cap—cap!"

"What is it?" he lazily asked, gazing up into the face of the man bent over him.

"Here's an answer from Dechaz," was the reply to Haley's question.

Taking it from the man's hand, Haley sat up, tore open the envelope, and inclosed found a dispatch which read:

"Will be up at ten to-night. Meet me at the train.
DECHAZ."

"All right, Barker," said Haley, looking up after finishing a perusal of the telegram. "You had better turn in now, for I want you for company to-night."

"Kerrect," said Barker, and turning away he sought his own cot.

Haley felt inclined to sleep longer, but shaking off the drowsy feeling, he left the room, washed himself, and went out doors; it was in the middle of the afternoon, and he found the air oppressive and close; not a breath of wind was stirring, and the sky was clear as crystal except for a thin haze which covered the western horizon.

"We'll have a storm to-night, sure as fate," thought Haley, and the truth of his prediction became apparent when the sun sank to rest in a huge bank of heavy black clouds, which arose slowly but steadily, advancing inch by inch.

At nine o'clock, Haley called Barker, who was a tall, broad-shouldered fellow, with an evil-looking face, adorned by a huge mustache; he occupied a sort of general position in this fraternity of counterfeiters, doing all the heavy work, such as running the press and the like; and he had been found useful in another way—in disposing of persons dangerous to the welfare of the gang; murder caused no shudder to cross his frame, he was too hardened for that, and Haley found him a fitting tool for any nefarious work.

So on this night, Haley selected Barker to accompany him to meet the detective; the railroad station was three miles distant, and for the sake of being less noticeable they were going to walk down the track to the station.

They reached there in good time, having some few minutes to spare before the train arrived; as Haley and Barker entered the front door of the depot, the former saw a figure disappear through the back door, which gave him a violent start.

"Is it possible?" he gasped, and then recollecting himself, he concealed his agitation of manner.

The train came thundering in, Dechaz alighted and was met by Haley, who drew him quickly aside into the shadow of the building.

"What's up?" asked the detective, struck by the queeriness of Haley's proceeding.

"Nothing particular," replied the captain of the counterfeiters. "Only it's best to be careful."

"Certainly," assented Dechaz. "Is that all?"

"Yes," was the reply Haley gave, not wishing to admit that he was actuated by what would appear to be a foolish fear; and yet he was troubled in mind, and troubled deeply, for the sight of that vanishing figure had filled him with alarm.

"Come on," he said, "let's go," and leading the way they started off down the track toward the workshop.

As they left the depot Haley cast one lingering, scrutinizing glance backward as if afraid of his gaze meeting some fear-inspiring object, but as it did not, he breathed easier, and strode onward in silence.

Meanwhile the storm-cloud had advanced and the lightning began to flash while the distant thunder muttered sullenly.

About half the distance had been accomplished, when, controlled by some undefinable feeling

of fear, Haley paused and looked back, just as a bright flash illumined the inky darkness.

Instantly his face paled, and his knees knocked together, while a groan escaped his lips.

"What's the matter, Haley?" was the detective's impatient question. "Are you losing your courage and becoming a cowardly old woman? Speak out! What's the matter?"

"We are—followed—by the—little man in black!" disjointedly gasped Haley.

CHAPTER VI.

FERRET STRIKES A CLEW.

EXHAUSTED and worn as Ferret was by the events of the night, including the struggle with the escaped counterfeiter, the exhaustion of his stay in the stream and the wearying of his tramp, he had no sooner thrown himself on the bed than he was fast asleep.

About three o'clock in the afternoon he awoke, and glanced about him and at the face of the youth who had saved his life; he remained perfectly quiet for several minutes, collecting his thoughts and laying plans for his future guidance.

Then he cautiously arose from the bed, not wishing to disturb Henry, donned his now dry clothing, and noiselessly left the room; making his way to the kitchen, he found the farmer's wife there; she looked up as he crossed the threshold, and mumbled out some words of recognition, to which Ferret replied with a pleasant:

"Good-morning."

"Are you going away now?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Don't you want some dinner first? I saved some for you," she added, in explanation, at the same time opening the oven doors of the stove, thereby disclosing several plates filled with wholesome food that gave out an appetizing odor.

"Thank you," said Ferret. "I will eat a little, if you please."

In response to her invitation, he sat himself down at the table, while she bustled around, and soon had everything in readiness.

"Ain't the other one coming down?" she queried, as Ferret commenced eating, alluding clearly to Henry.

"No. He's asleep yet. Do not wake him, but let him finish his sleep; I will leave a note for him up stairs."

Ferret soon had enough, when, arising from the table, he went back to the room, and sitting down, drew forth a blank book from which he tore a leaf; with a pencil he wrote:

"Enclosed find ten dollars more, which is all I can spare at present. If you cannot find work and are hard pressed for money, go to New York and give your name to Dodge, Mead & Co., Bankers, and they will supply you with any moderate sum on my account. One thing more, and bear it in mind, do not follow me nor seek to know who or what I am. Should you do so, you may have cause to repent it. Remember!

Your friend,
"F."

This finished, Ferret folded it up, and wrote on the outside:

"HENRY BEEBE DECKER."

He then deposited the note in a place likely to attract immediate attention, and then cautiously left the room, and entered the kitchen again, where the farmer's wife handed him a hat belonging to her husband, for which accommodation the detective paid liberally.

Leaving the house at just four o'clock, he struck straight across lots toward the stream, and reaching it, he followed its course with un-

swerving faithfulness for a distance of six or seven miles; he then stopped at a farm-house and procured something to eat, after which he sat down on the porch of the house, and gave himself up to his thoughts and the enjoyment of a cigar furnished by his host.

He was puzzled as to what step he should next take."

Personal comfort suggested that he should remain at the farm-house over night; but Ferret's was one of those natures which dislike inactivity when anything was before him for accomplishment; and surely he had enough work to perform; he looked at the clouded heavens, and from the indications knew that a storm would break before the midnight hour, yet he was not a man to be deterred by the warring of the elements, and often had braved the inclemencies of all kinds of weather in the performance of duty.

As the old-fashioned, tall Dutch clock in the kitchen chimed out the hour of eight, his host approached him with the question:

"Do you want to stay all night?"

"That is just what I was trying to decide myself," said Ferret.

"I don't want to hurry you," said the farmer, "but we all go to bed here early, and if you want to stay my wife must fix a place for you."

For a minute Ferret remained silent, then suddenly asked:

"How far is it to the nearest railroad station, or—" pausing an instant, "telegraph office?"

"About five miles."

"Is the road good between here and there?"

"Yes, it's a good road, easily followed, and nearly straight."

"Many thanks, then, for your kindness, but I believe I'll go," and he sprang to his feet. "Will you pilot me a little way on the right road?"

"Yes," was the hesitating reply of the farmer, who evidently did not much relish the idea of accompanying an utter stranger on such a dark and gloomy night.

But after they had started Ferret soon succeeded in putting him at ease, and when finally the tiller of soil halted, he informed the detective that the station was but two miles distant.

"Well, I'm much obliged to you for your kindness," said Ferret. "Good-night," and he held out his hand to shake that of his companion, who, when he withdrew it from the detective's, found in it a bill, the value of which he afterward ascertained was five dollars.

Ferret trudged bravely onward in the darkness, after the separation, and it was not very long before his eyes were rewarded by the sight of a light shining through a window, appearing like a beckoning and bright star in the dense darkness.

Step by step he approached the place where the light shone, and finally he stepped into the little railroad station, which was deserted, except for the presence of a few loungers who were awaiting the coming of the nearly due train.

Ferret stepped up to the little shelving desk for the purpose of writing a dispatch; the pen was in his hand, when the sounds of footsteps on the platform outside attracted his attention, and he glanced out of the window just as the new-comers passed in front of it; the light struck across their faces for just a brief space of time, yet long enough for the detective to recognize one of them; dropping the pen he held, he started for the back door, passed out of it as Haley and Barker entered the front door, and once outside he concealed himself in the shade of the building, where he waited patiently for further developments.

When the train came in he saw, from a secluded position, the getting off of Dechaz, his

meeting with Haley, and their shrinking back out of sight.

"That looks suspicious," thought Ferret. "I wonder if I was seen? But suppose I was? He can hardly suspect me, even if he recognized me."

He waited a minute or two, and then the train thundered on, and Dechaz, Haley and Barker departed.

"Now is my chance," muttered the little detective. "I've struck a clew, I'm sure of it, and with good luck there'll be a howling in Rome before long. Now, Ferret, brace up and see what good you are," and he started off in the wake of the trio, none of whom, excepting Haley, suspected, or even dreamed of the presence of an enemy.

He followed the sound of their footsteps, never seeing them, except when an occasional flash of lightning illumined the scene; as for himself, he kept to one side of the track, and took advantage of any screen that presented itself.

As one vivid flash darted from the leaden clouds, he saw that one of the trio was looking back. Instantly he halted and listened, fearing that his presence had been discovered, but when the rumbling thunder had died away, he heard the sound of falling feet ahead, descending with as much regularity as before.

"It's all right, Ferret," he muttered to himself; swing in, my boy, only be careful."

CHAPTER VII.

THE RAILROAD SCENE.

"Who is the little man in black?" quickly asked Duchaz.

"A detective," was the reply.

"Nonsense!" was the contemptuous rejoinder of Dechaz; "there is no detective in this part of the country."

"But there is," persisted Haley, "and he is following us."

They had halted, but convinced that something more than mere fancy had actuated Haley, Dechaz said:

"Well, don't stop; walk on." As they stepped onward again, he said: "You are sure some one is behind us?"

"Yes."

"Then, Barker, you haul out right here in the shade of these rocks; we will walk on and deceive the fellow, and when he passes you, clip him across the head."

"All right," said Barker, stepping aside.

"Whistle when you've fixed him."

"Kerect."

And thus quickly was the plot formed which lulled Ferret into a sense of security, and inculcated the idea that he had been unobserved.

Just at that moment great, large drops of rain came pattering down, augmenting in number so rapidly, that in less than two minutes the rain was descending in very torrents.

Unconscious of the danger ahead, Ferret merely buttoned up his coat and plodded on; nearer he approached the spot where Barker crouched, with a large stone in his hands, ready to deprive him of life; he was just opposite the concealed villain, when another flash of lightning broke forth; in that momentary space of time, Ferret saw that but two composed the party ahead, and that the third was crouching close by his side.

With a startled cry, Ferret attempted to spring aside, but too late; Barker was already on his feet, and bounding quickly forward, he brought the stone heavily down on the little detective's head, felling him to the ground in a partially insensible condition, yet with sense enough left to know the cause of the attack; he tried to rise to his feet, but Barker was upon him, claspings his throat tightly.

Ferret's mind began to waver, but before reason fled entirely, he inserted his free hand into an outside pocket, drew out a little bundle, and unseen by his antagonist, threw it some feet away, even as his struggles ceased and unconsciousness overtook him.

Knowing that his victim was powerless, Barker arose to his feet and gave a shrill whistle, to which a reply was given by Haley, as he and Dechaz turned and retraced their steps.

"Well, Barker," said Dechaz, when he had reached the place, "did you fix him?"

"Yes."

Haley gave a sigh of relief, then said:

"Now let's go through the fellow, and see if we are mistaken."

They searched his pockets and took from them a roll of money, a watch, pen-knife, some keys, a brace of revolvers and a dagger.

"Nothing there except the weapons to indicate a detective," said Barker.

"Yes, there is," said Dechaz, rising to his feet, "here is a badge of some kind."

"Strike a match and let's have a look at it," said Haley.

"Strike a match in this rain?" said Dechaz; "are you losing your senses?"

"Let me take it, then."

Dechaz passed it to Haley, who in his eagerness to clutch the badge, let it fall from his fingers; they heard a metallic ring as it struck on the track and bounded off.

"D—n the luck," cried Haley, stooping down in search of the badge, only to rise after a fruitless endeavor, cursing his luck roundly.

"He's getting uneasy," here said Barker, referring to Ferret. "What are we going to do with him?"

"Knife him!" suggested Dechaz.

"Yes, kill him somehow," said Haley, who, catching a flitting glimpse of the detective's face, recognized in him the man who had stood beside him at his uncle's grave.

"You want him out of the way, then?" said Barker.

"Yes."

"Then do as I say."

"What is that?"

"Tie him to the track. The express train comes along in a little while, and it'll crush him to jelly," and a fiendish ring pervaded the cold-blooded villain's tone.

"How are we going to tie him?" asked the practical Dechaz.

"With rope."

"Where are you going to get it?"

"I've got it already," quickly replied Barker, drawing a bunch of strong twine from his pocket. "It ain't very thick, but we can twist it together."

Nobody dissenting, Barker twisted the twine into a good, thick rope; with two short pieces he tied the detective's hands; then picking him up, Barker carried him across the few feet that intervened, and laid him across the track, his head resting on one rail his feet on the other.

With deft fingers, Barker tied his feet to the rail, separated a short distance; he was about tying his neck down when the detective's consciousness returned, hurried by the rain dashing into his face; instantly he realized what his foes were doing, and convulsed with horror, he cried:

"My God! What are you doing?"

"Just having a little fun," was Barker's fiendish reply. "You see, the express train is due shortly, and—you know the rest!"

With a shrill cry Ferret strove to break his bonds and arise, but with curses on his lips, the devil in human form forced him back, and rapidly finished his hellish task.

"Fiend! Monster! Inhuman devil!" gasped the

little detective. "Would you murder me thus foully?"

"Of course," said Baker; "don't you see that we mean to? There!" he added, in a satisfied tone; "that knot's all right; it's a perfect beauty, and you can squirm as much as you please, and you won't be able to move your head two inches. Now we've finished, and are going. Tra-la-la, my boy; pleasant dreams!" and his task completed the brute turned his back on the wretched Ferret, and joined Dechaz and Haley, some few feet distant.

Ferret's heart sank within his bosom as the wretch walked away, and the brutal laugh that rang out when he joined his companions, sank deeply into the detective's brain, for he knew it was his death-knell.

A merciful peal of thunder drowned it at last, and when it died away all was silence, except for the beating of the rain. Ferret was alone with death!

It was a fitting night for such hellish work; fitting in that the war of the elements drowned the agonized cries that came from the doomed man.

Oh, what a world of agony rent Ferret's breast! death in a fight, when he had a chance, had no terrors for him; but to be bound to a railroad track, unable to move, knowing that a train would soon pass, it was sufficient to create a hell in any mortal man's bosom.

But—listen!

Above all the noise of the thunder, the wind and the rain—can be heard a low rumble; Ferret's soul shrank within his breast, for well he knew what it meant; it was the express train coming to send him to eternity.

"Father in Heaven, save me!" he moaned.

"Pleasant sound, hey!"

A streak of lightning disclosed the figure of Barker not ten feet away.

"Hell-born monster!" screamed Ferret. "Have you come back to taunt me? To witness my dying agonies?"

"Yes," was the cool reply. "Take it easy, though—you might as well."

It was horrible—horrible beyond description, to lie there and wait for a cruel death.

"Go away," cried Ferret. "Leave me alone to die. Help—help!"

"That's right, scream your lungs out, it may do you some good," said Barker, tauntingly.

"Help—help!" he yelled again, crazed by the rapidly nearing rumble of the train.

"Help—help!" mimicked his devilish tormentor.

Ferret groaned in agony, and turned his head far enough to look up the track in the direction whence the train would come.

Just then a shrill screaming of the whistle broke the stillness, and Ferret, gathering himself, sought to burst the bonds; but finding it impossible, he gave another cry, in which the despair of a doomed man was apparent, for:

"Help, for God's sake—help!"

"It is here!" came the response.

Barker started in alarm, while Ferret uttered a fervent:

"God be praised!"

Both turned in the direction of the voice, and at the moment a flash of lightning disclosed the horrid scene to the new-comer, who was none other than Henry Beebe Decker.

He saw the man tied on the track, saw Barker, with drawn revolver, prepared to kill any one who interfered; as for the detective, he recognized his young friend, and prayed God to assist him.

Another flash succeeded quickly, and Barker saw the young fellow, knife in hand, springing toward the bound man; with a curse on his lips he sprang to meet the intruder, crying, hoarsely:

"Back there, or I'll let daylight in you through a bullet hole!"

"Get out of my way!" shouted Henry, attempting to slip by Barker, who made a vicious blow at him with the butt of his revolver, which the lad eluded by nimbly jumping to one side.

Within a minute they were closely interlocked and fighting like demons.

The storm had reached its climax, the rain fell in sheets, the thunder rolled steadily and heavily, scarce broken by a pause.

With bulging eyes, Ferret watched the fearful conflict on which his life depended.

Another shriek of the whistle, and turning his head, he saw afar off the headlight of the coming locomotive looming up in the darkness like the glaring eye of some terrible monster.

Groaning with anguish, Ferret looked at the combatants again, and saw Barker fire a shot straight into Henry's breast; for a moment the lad wavered on his feet, then, nerved by desperation, he clutched his antagonist more closely just as a fearful sheet of jagged flame burst from the inky clouds.

The bolt struck the earth not far away, and rent the ground.

He felt a fearful pain shoot through his breast, and his eyes were blinded; he was literally torn loose from Barker, and flung heavily to the ground by the force of the electric shock, which also wrenched the revolver from his hand; racked by intense pain, and dazed, and partly stupefied, he still could not forget the danger to another being, and leaped to his feet; a short distance away was Barker slowly assuming a sitting position, his eyes fell on Henry, and he remembered what had occurred; he arose and darted forward, replacing the revolver torn from his grasp by a murderous-looking knife; the antagonists met, each made a fearful lunge at the other, and both fell to the ground, bleeding from terrible knife wounds.

"My God! I'm dying," gasped Barker.

The blood flowed from Henry's breast in a crimson tide and he felt weak and faint, and commenced drifting into unconsciousness.

Ferret knew what had transpired, and with a horrified face looked at the now near-by locomotive.

"Help—help!" he wailed.

The cry struck on the ear of the lad and riveted his straying mind.

With a prayer on his lips he attempted to rise to his feet but fell heavily; and across the track.

"Good God!" moaned Ferret. "Can't you move?"

"I'll try," came the weak reply.

Clutching the knife in his teeth, and staying the crimson tide with one hand, Henry arose to his knees, and steadying himself with his free hand, by the greatest effort, while suffering excruciating torture, he dragged himself along toward Ferret.

Oh! how fast the train seemed to be speeding; faster and faster it seemed, as if the glaring eye having caught sight of its prey, the monster flew to destroy its life.

"Kind Father in Heaven strengthen me," groaned Henry.

It was a grand, but terrible sight.

That of a weak, bleeding, perhaps dying youth struggling even in the throes of what might be dissolution to save the life of another.

Inch by inch he drew close to the detective; every moment seemed to take an age, and yet it was but the fraction of a minute.

He placed his hand on the detective when the train was about five hundred yards away, just as the whistle shrieked the signal "down brakes," the engineer having discovered them.

Even then Henry almost gave up, but his

strength of will came to his rescue, and unheeding the pains which tore him, he severed the bonds confining Ferret's feet, with one sweeping cut; seizing the rail on which the detective's head was lying, he dragged himself over, cut the rope, and with his last remaining ounce of strength rolled outside the track, when he already could feel the hot breath of the snorting iron horse, which thundered by, missing him by scarce an inch; his fearful exertions had started the blood at a terrible rate, and his consciousness fled as he rolled himself over, his last recollection being of a terrible, blood-chilling cry of a human being launched into eternity.

Had he arrived too late?

CHAPTER VIII.

BARKER'S DEATH.

As a wild wail of mortal agony arose above the noise of the storm, as the locomotive thundered past, Harry rolled off the track unconscious.

And Ferret?

And Barker?

The engine was within a very few feet of the little detective when the last bond that held him was severed.

To avoid being struck seemed an impossibility, but gathering himself quickly, he bent slightly and took a flying leap which carried him with scarcely a hair's breadth of space out of harm's way; he landed on his knees and fell in a doubled-up position.

As the train rushed by and that scream of pain struck upon his ear, he arose to his feet, crying, mentally:

"My God! has he sacrificed his life for mine?"

And standing where he arose he waited for the lightning to flash, so that he could learn the truth.

And Barker?

Nearly, if not quite as badly wounded as Harry had been, he remained where he fell after he received the cut with the knife, partially across the track; he seemed dazed, stupefied, and apparently did not realize the danger he was in until he saw Ferret bound outside the rails.

Then it struck him, and groaning with pain he tried to drag himself out of the way; but too late! for just as he was crossing the outside rail, and while crouching abjectly, the cowcatcher first struck him, and even as his wail of agony rang out, the huge driving wheels crushed head, body, and limbs into a confused and shapeless mass of blood and flesh.

The train had come to a stand-still and was beginning to back down, when a vivid flash of lightning broke forth from the clouds, lighting up the ghastly spectacle.

Ferret saw the body and a groan was sent from his breast.

He stepped hastily forward and reached the spot just as another flash came.

It lasted but a moment, but long enough for Ferret to ascertain that it was not his young friend who had suffered this horrible death, but the cold-blooded, heartless scoundrel who had intended meting out that fate to him.

"A just punishment," thought Ferret. "But where is the brave lad?"

He looked about him, waiting for a sight of Henry, which was given him just as the spot was reached by the conductor of the train and several brakemen, carrying lanterns.

"Jumping Jupiter!" ejaculated one of the brakemen, observing the ghastly remains of the dead villain, "this is fearful!"

"It is, indeed," said the conductor, and then approaching Ferret, who, in the meanwhile had reached Henry's side, he asked:

"What, in the name of God, does all this mean?"

For a moment Ferret was puzzled as to how he should reply so as not to reveal the mission he was on; then his wits came to his rescue, and he replied:

"The dead fellow is a footpad, who first knocked me down, robbed me, and then tied me to the track. This young lad here arrived just in the nick of time, and after a severe struggle with the burly ruffian, got the upper hand of him, and cut the bonds that held me just in time to save my life. A second later, and there would have been no need of jumping!" and, as he finished, a shudder ran over his frame.

"That's true," said the engineer, who, leaving the engine in charge of the fireman, had hastened to the scene of the catastrophe, himself joining in Ferret's shudder—"true as gospel. Good Heaven, but wasn't it a close shave!"

"Well, boys," said the conductor, recovering his equanimity to some extent, "we haven't much time to spare. Pick the body up and put it in the baggage-room until we get to the next station. And here," to Ferret, "I'll help you with this brave lad."

"All right," said Ferret, "many thanks. But lend me your lantern a minute."

Having it placed in his hands, the little detective instituted a close search, and in a few moments had discovered his shield, as well as the little package he had thrown away, which, falling into the counterfeiter's hands, would have made fruitless any attempts at unearthing them.

Ferret and Henry were both soaked to the skin, and the rain being cold, it was decidedly unpleasant, although one of them knew nothing of heat, cold, rain or shine.

The unconscious lad was tenderly borne to the cars, in one of which he was carefully laid, with a chair cushion for a pillow.

The train was started on its way again, and after a short but rapid run, they whisked into the station, where they made a stop.

Unaccustomed to having the express train halt, the station-master gazed at it with open-mouth-wonder.

"Hey," yelled the conductor, "open the baggage-room!"

Unquestioningly the station-master obeyed, and on the heads of three barrels the mangled remains of Barker was stretched.

Then Henry was taken into the depot, and there remained with his head supported in Ferret's lap until the train was speeding onward again, when the detective called the station-master to him, saying:

"Have you a spare room in your house?"

"Yes," was the hesitating reply.

"Well, this lad is badly hurt. Will you take him in and care for him till he is well?"

"I don't know," was the evasive reply.

"You will be well paid for any trouble you may take," suggested Ferret, knowing the road to the hearts of most of the human family.

"Well, I'll see about it," said the station-master in reply. "My house is near by, and I must see my wife first. Stay here a minute."

"Very well, only be quick."

"I will," and he departed to consult his wife.

Her answer was in the affirmative, and to the house of the station-master, whose name was Barnes, Henry was at once removed.

Alarmed at his long continued unconsciousness, Ferret bade Barnes go hunt up a physician, and the good-hearted fellow departed to perform the errand.

The doctor came, saw Henry, gravely shook his head, and then applied various remedies, which combined, restored the lad, who at once commenced moaning with pain in a manner cal-

culated to wring the heart of anybody who heard.

As for Ferret, he felt keenly for the brave lad who had twice risked his life for him, and advancing to the bedside, he took Henry's hand and pressed it gently but warmly.

Henry looked at him, then returned the gentle pressure.

"You know me?"

"Yes," was the faint reply.

"The doctor wants to dress your wounds now. Can you bear it?"

"Yes," he answered, "I must!" and Henry closed his teeth and compressed his lips so decidedly that Ferret mentally exclaimed:

"Grit to the back bone!"

"You must keep perfectly quiet," said the doctor, addressing the suffering lad. "I am going to hurt you a little, but you must try and stand it."

"Go on with your work," said Henry, just a little impatiently, "and don't take me for a sickly old grandmother."

"Spoken like a brave little man," said Mrs. Barnes, who was also beside the bed, and with her face expressing compassion and pity, she bent over the lad and imprinted a kiss on his forehead.

Barnes stood close beside Ferret, and the latter hearing a gasping noise, glanced at the station-master, whose face expressed the utmost surprise; he stared at his worthy spouse, and the detective heard him mutter:

"By golly, has the old woman gone crazy?"

"What's the matter?" asked Ferret, in a low tone.

"I—I—I—" stuttered Barnes, "I'm surprised. Hain't seen her do the likes of that for the Lord knows how long," and withdrawing a few feet, he continued talking to himself in a low tone, which was finally interrupted by Mrs. Barnes saying in a shrill voice, pitched somewhere near high C:

"Barnes!"

"Yes, my dear," he replied, picking the rim of his hat nervously.

"Stop pulling your hat to pieces."

"Yes, my love," he meekly answered, seeking occupation for his disengaged hand by inserting it in his pocket, and playing with a bunch of keys belonging to the station.

"Stop that noise. Barnes, don't you know any better when this boy is sick?" and then without waiting for any answer, she continued, "you can't do no good here. Go to bed, hadn't you better?"

"I think so, my love," he said, hesitatingly. "Yes, I'd better. Good-night, all," and turning, he strode hastily through the door.

It was plain to Ferret why Barnes had expressed surprise.

He was a henpecked husband.

This little by-play over, the doctor turned his attention to his work, and producing lint and lotions he proceeded to bandage the wounds with stripes produced with alacrity, when requested by the virago, for such Ferret had decided she was.

But she was interested in Henry and would be kind to him, and that was all Ferret wished of her.

Henry bore the pain attendant upon the dressing of his wounds like a hero, and after it was finished, fell asleep, and did not wake until the next morning, when he found himself sufficiently recovered to explain to Ferret how he had chanced to arrive at the railroad so opportunely.

On awaking, after being left in the little farmhouse, he had arisen, and some minutes later had found the note left for him by Ferret; after reading it he descended to the kitchen, and after

eating a hearty dinner sat himself down to think, and reached the conclusion that he would go to the city again.

Alone and unacquainted with the road, he started for the station, and being directed through the woods as a short cut, he lost his way, a most natural thing under the circumstances.

And he wandered around hither and thither, heeding not the direction he took, for he was in a maze.

Seeking refuge from the shower under a large tree, not knowing that he was near the railroad, he had remained there until aroused by the detective's cry for help, when, as has been described, he rushed upon the scene.

CHAPTER IX.

FERRET ON THE TRAIL.

THE news of the strange midnight adventure flew like wild-fire, and many city reporters sought out Ferret, who, giving them a fictitious and false story, the circumstances barely were mentioned in the New York papers, an object greatly desired by Ferret, since he knew any great publicity must result in his identity being guessed, and that once known he felt sure his birds would fly cover.

He spent almost the entire day following his second escape from death at the hands of the counterfeiters, in keeping a close watch on the station, as he felt certain some of the dead man's friends would show up, either to view the body or perhaps claim it.

The night before, it will be remembered, Barker had gone on with Haley and Dechaz; they had not gone far when Haley expressed some fear that perhaps the bonds were not securely fastened.

"Yes they are," said Barker; "but if you don't think they are I'll go back and see."

"Good!" said Haley, "and stay until he gives his last kick."

"Kerrect," and humming a gay drinking song the red-handed villain returned to meet the fate he wished to assure himself the detective would receive.

As for Dechaz and Haley, they continued on their way, and finally leaving the track struck into the path that led through the woods to their rendezvous.

When nearly there they heard the shrill scream of the locomotive whistle as it ordered "down breaks," but little dreaming of its true significance they passed on, and finally entered the long, low house.

"So," said Dechaz, when once inside, resuming the conversation interrupted by their entrance, "you expect me to see about Kate's release?"

"Yes."

"Well, I will do all I can, but I can promise nothing."

"But you can do it," asserted Haley.

"Possibly. But remember one thing, cap, I have to be careful so as not to give myself away. That wouldn't do."

"That's so."

"Certainly; for was it not for information timely given you, you would all have been juggled before this?"

"Well—well, Dechaz, do what you can. I know I can trust you."

After a long continued conversation, Haley suddenly exclaimed:

"D— it! what keeps Barker so?"

"Give it up," and Dechaz laughed slightly. "Give me an easier one."

But even he began to look serious, when, hours having passed, Barker had not put in an appearance.

What could it mean?

They could think of nothing that could possibly detain him, and yet he had not come.

There was just a little anxiety in the watch they kept for Barker's return, a watch kept up until morning dawned, and the storm having passed, the sun climbed above the horizon, and slowly mounted the skies in performance of his daily task.

By this time they were well satisfied that something had befallen Barker.

But what?

That puzzled them.

"Do you really think," said Haley, "that that man was a detective?"

"I hardly know what to think of him," said Dechaz. "I never knew a detective of his make-up, and never heard of one, yet his movements were suspicious, and besides, that badge—"

"Might not the badge have been a company or association medal of some kind?"

"It might."

"That must be the case," said Haley, in not the most convinced of tones, but determined to look at the best side of the matter. "That must be it! He is no detective; we were mistaken! But there is one thing, he is a plucky little cuss, and maybe he got the best of Barker somehow."

"Pooh!" contemptuously said Dechaz. "He was bound too well for that."

"Then what keeps Barker?"

"I don't know," was the frank reply.

"I'm going to find out, then," and Haley sprang to his feet.

"Do so."

"Jerry!" called Haley, and when that person put in an appearance, he said:

"Go and tell Dave Dempsey I want him."

Jerry went down the trap-door to the cellar and into the work-room, from which shortly emerged the person named, a short, thickset fellow, with sandy hair, whiskers and mustache, and reddish-brown eyes; in general appearance he would be taken for phlegmatic and dull, and yet he was one of the shrewdest "shovers of queer" in the whole country, and withal an expert in engraving.

"How are you?" he said, as he confronted Haley and Dechaz.

Without pausing to reply, Haley said:

"Dave, I have a job on hand for you."

"What is it?"

"Barker went to the depot with me last night, and hasn't come back yet. I want you to find out where he is." And then Haley proceeded to give an inkling of the state of affairs.

Dave professed himself willing, and at once got ready to go.

Following the path through the woods, he emerged on the railroad track and followed that until, nearing the spot where the bloody scene had been enacted, he saw a group of men.

Wondering what could have brought them together, and aware that it was on the very spot to which Barker had returned, he was somewhat mystified, and halted in mind whether to go forward or back.

Deciding on the former, he approached the spot, being saluted with:

"Took a walk to see the spot?"

"Yes," was Dave's random reply.

The crowd separating a little he saw before him a pool of coagulated blood, intermingled with which were little bits of flesh and bone.

Hardened man as he was, he could not forbear shuddering at the fearful tale which the crimson puddle unfolded.

"Who was it?" he asked of the man nearest him.

"I don't know. They say he was a foot-pad."

"So I understand," said Dempsey, taking his cue. "What kind of a looking man was he?"

"I don't know. Barnes wouldn't let anybody into the baggage-room while I was there."

"Just the way he served me," said Dempsey, in a cool tone and manner. "Well, I guess I'll go back. Who's going?"

"I am," was the response of several, and quite a little party started down the track, headed by Dempsey, who knew where the body was as soon as the name of Barnes was mentioned.

When they reached the station the coroner was just leaving, having empaneled a jury to look at the body so as to be able to take evidence as soon as the witnesses could be summoned to attend an inquest.

The body was still lying in the baggage-room, in an out-of-the-way corner of which Ferret stood, partially concealed, gazing keenly at each and every one of the crowd that came surging in to view the ghastly spectacle.

Dempsey entered among the rest, but something in his actions caused Ferret to eye him sharply.

As he stopped beside the body, Dempsey bent and gave a penetrating, searching look into the disfigured face, and then took a sweeping glance at the body and its torn and soiled clothing.

"It's Barker, sure enough," he muttered, under his breath, and turning around, he started for the door, intending to at once return and report the result of his search to his companions in crime.

"A-ha!" thought Ferret, "I'm on the trail once more, and we'll see with what success this time," and leaving his secluded nook he followed Dempsey outside.

It was by this time late in the afternoon, and the rumble of a coming train was heard in the distance.

Dempsey went around to the landing platform, and thither Ferret also went.

A few minutes later the train came rushing in; a newsboy jumped off, holding under his arm a large bundle of evening papers.

"Here's yer ev'nin' papers!" he yelled. "Full account o' the railroad murder. Here yer goes—ev'nin' papers—pa-a-pers!"

One of the first to patronize the boy was Dempsey, who at once looked at the account of the affair, and having read it hastily, Ferret heard him heave a sigh of relief.

Dempsey had feared to find a full or partial expose of the counterfeit gang of which he was a member, but Ferret's concocted story suited admirably in lulling fear.

The account read as follows:

JUST RETRIBUTION.

A Murderous Tramp Meets a Horrible Death.

"Last night occurred one of the most tragic incidents so seldom met with outside the pages of romance. An unknown but respectable appearing man was waylaid last night during the heavy storm, which for wildness has never been equaled before in these parts, by a burly tramp, who, after knocking him senseless and robbing him, tied him across the railroad track, knowing full well that an express train would soon be along.

"The bound wretch prayed for mercy when the pelting rain had restored him to consciousness, but his cruel captor, laughing at his cries, informed him that he need not hope for mercy.

"The poor fellow in his agony called for help shrilly, when he saw the far off headlight of the locomotive, and heard the jar of the wheels which were to crush him to a mass of quivering, pulseless flesh.

"His captor taunted; he called for help again. Help came in the person of another tramp, who

had been in the wood. A fight ensued and both were badly wounded, the robber falling across the track, while the other tramp succeeded in cutting loose the unfortunate victim just in time to save his life. But the robber, wounded too badly to crawl out of the way, was ground to powder beneath the wheels of the iron monster, dying instantly. Truly, the scene must have been fearful.

"We await further developments."

"Well," thought Dempsey, "it's all right, then, I guess. That fellow wasn't a detective at all, and Barker didn't have no chance to squeal, and we're as safe as a genuine bank note."

He folded up the paper and put it in his pocket, and then left the depot, taking the most direct course to the counterfeiters' rendezvous, with Ferret on the trail.

CHAPTER X.

IN DANGER AND OUT.

DEMPSEY, knowing full well the impatience of his men, hurried on to make it known, while Ferret walked on behind, keeping him always in sight.

In this way they proceeded until night began to fall; then Ferret closed up the space between them, until he was but a short distance in the rear.

He stepped as lightly as he could, so as to give Dempsey no clew to his presence.

Presently he heard a meeting take place between the person he was following, and another individual, which resulted in their walking on a short distance and then entering a house.

Ferret approached the house, and having scanned it closely in the dim light, he muttered:

"I won't forget the house, or the location, either."

And then he stood still, thinking what his next step should be.

Did the house before him conceal all of the counterfeiting gang?

Was it their rendezvous?

Or, was it merely an ordinary house, whose inhabitants were friendly to them?

"I've got the clew now; that's enough for the present."

Thus thought Ferret, and facing about he commenced slowly plodding in the direction whence he came, not intending, however, to leave the neighborhood, as that in future, must, he knew, be the field of operations.

So deeply bound in thought was he, and so little did he dream of any such thing happening, that he never saw two dark figures stealing along in the night on his trail.

Yes, the tracker was tracked.

And knew it not.

Dempsey had dropped to the fact that some one was following behind, and the unceasing regularity with which the person behind regulated his light, but still perceptible footsteps, inspired him with due caution.

Meeting Sam Young, one of the gang, he had hastily told him his fears, and together they had turned aside and entered the house, whose owner was not entirely averse to them, as he had made many a dollar out of them by the performance of sundry errands.

Once inside, they kept an eye on Ferret, saw him approach and leave, and then leaving the house they followed after, determined to put out of the way so dangerous a character, whom Dempsey shrewdly guessed was none other than the man who had been tied to the track the night before.

And Ferret it was.

It will be remembered that he had been struck

by a piece of rock which laid the
been carefully patched up, and it
left the detective nearly as good as new, although
the blood he had lost made him feel somewhat
weak.

He made up his mind not to go far before
finding shelter of some kind.

A few minutes later he crossed a bridge which
had been erected over a good-sized creek; about
several hundred feet up stream Ferret saw,
gleaming brightly like a star, the rays of a lamp.
He determined to shelter there.

Finding a path leading to the house, he ap-
proached it with rapid steps, every movement be-
ing noticed by the counterfeiters with delight.

As Ferret neared the place, he saw that the
house had once been used as some kind of a mill,
for one end of it stood on a foundation built up
in the brawling, noisy current, while the struc-
ture itself was a heavy, lumbering affair.

When within a few steps of the door, a loud
wail, prolonged and deep, rang on the night air.

Involuntarily he turned and waited, but it was
not repeated, and then he stepped quickly for-
ward and rapped at the door.

There was a sound of scurrying feet across the
floor, then quietness for a minute, after which
the door was opened and a surly voice asked:

"What's wantin'?"

"Some supper and a night's lodging."

"Hain't got much grub."

"What you have will do."

"Nor a good bed, neither."

"It'll answer."

"How's the pay?"

"Good," and Ferret drew out his pocketbook,
selected a bill, and put it in his vest pocket.

"Come in," said the heavy-voiced individual,
in tones softened by that powerful oiler, money.

Ferret passed inside, and at once gave a keen
glance all around the apartment in search of the
person who had emitted that agonizing cry.

But no one was present except an old, wrinkled,
hard-featured dame, whom Ferret was soon in-
troduced to as "Mrs. Grugger, my wife," by his
host, Mr. Timothy Grugger, as he soon informed
the detective, from Grugger Hollow, Grugger-
ville, Cheshire, England.

"Come, old woman," said Tim, "bustle around
now, and get the gentleman some supper. Be
lively, gal."

And Mrs. Grugger at once arose and busied
herself in getting something ready for Ferret.

Meanwhile the counterfeiters outside, the seek-
ers for human blood, were dancing with joy.

"We've got him dead to rights this time," said
Dempsey, in an exultant tone.

"Yes, that is true."

"You've seen old Tim Grugger, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"And know him?"

"Yes."

"Says I. Yes, I know him for a desperate old
villain, who would as soon slit a weasand as eat
a meal if he got a good chance and could cover
up his tracks."

"I know it," said Young. "But what are we
to do?"

"Wait here until our friend goes to bed; then
we'll go in and have a confab with Tim and fix
it all right with him. Then one of us must take
a midnight stroll and come back satisfied that
somebody will never track us again."

A fearful meaning lay in the latter portion of
his words, for they meant murder.

Inside the house Ferret was trying to pump his
host as to whether the old mill contained any
other inmates than himself and wife.

"Me and the old gal're all as lives here," said

Tim, "and we never has company 'cept some one
drops in like what you has."

Ferret was mystified and puzzled.

He was satisfied that the cry had come from
other lips than those of either of the Grug-
gers, and yet they both with sober faces as-
serted that no other living being occupied any
part of the building.

He scanned their faces closely, and was not
long in making up his mind that they were good
indices to their characters, which then must be
cruel, cowardly, treacherous, crafty.

When ten o'clock came, Ferret arose, asking
the question:

"Where am I to sleep?"

"Up stairs. I'll show you the way," and Grug-
gers arose and picked up a bottle, in the neck of
which sputtered a tallow candle.

Holding this in his hand he passed up a pair
of stairs to the floor above, and then crossing
this, he mounted another pair of stairs, at the
top of which was a trap-door, which the old man
pushed up to allow Ferret to enter his room.

By the aid of the candle Gruggers held, Ferret
managed to obtain a pretty good view of the ar-
rangement of the room, and although the furni-
ture and bedding was not very inviting in ap-
pearance, still it would answer.

"I'll leave the candle," said Gruggers, and set-
ting it down on the floor, he disappeared through
the trap-door, which Ferret at once closed.

The more the detective thought of old Grug-
gers' looks the more the idea impressed him that
he was an evil one, and thinking caution best
under the circumstances, he did not undress, and
after visiting the one window in his room, and
finding that it overlooked the stream, he tum-
bled into bed, and tired as he was, soon fell
asleep.

Outside, Dempsey and his companion, Young,
watched and waited.

"He's gone to bed," said Dempsey, when the
light disappeared from below.

They waited about half an hour, and then ap-
proaching the house, Dempsey knocked lightly
on the door, then knocked again ere it was
opened.

"Sh!" was the greeting Gruggers received.

"I've got a big thing for you."

"Who are you?"

"Dempsey."

"Ah! what is it?"

"I'll give you a hundred dollars to let me get
at the man who stopped here a while ago."

"A hundred—sure?"

"Yes, and here it is," and Dempsey gave him
the amount named.

"All right," said Gruggers—"all right; go
ahead."

"But where is he?"

"I'll show you. But take off your shoes."

And so in stocking feet they all noiselessly
mounted the stairs.

"There he is," said Gruggers, pointing to the
trap-door; "in that room."

"Very well," said Dempsey. "Now you can
go; we'll tend to the rest."

Gruggers departed, and Dempsey and Young
decided that the latter should be the one to
mount the stairs and set free the breath of life
in Ferret's body.

So Young mounted the stairs.

Ferret was awakened not by the slight noise
they made; saw not the trap door raised; nei-
ther did he see the vile features of the murderous
villain protruded, nor the grim satisfaction with
which he brought a revolver to bear on the bed.

Slowly, slowly, the trap-door was raised high-
er and finally Young stepped on the floor, and
then glided toward the bed, drawing, in addi-
tion to his revolver, a long and keen knife.

Whether it was the noise made by the counter-
feiter, or the sense of presence as felt by every
body at times, Ferret never knew; but waking
he suddenly unclashed his eyelids to see but sever-
al feet from his bed the seeker after his life.

With a bound he was out of bed and grappling
with the intruder, who, losing his hold on revol-
ver and knife, and they dropping to the floor,
was unarmed; but Young was an athletic, pow-
erful person, far stronger than Ferret, who
fought like a perfect fury.

It looked bad for Ferret when they approached
the window in their struggle. An idea struck
him, and suddenly changing his position he
tripped Young, who, with a wild scream, went
headlong downward, plunging down into the
rocky-bedded stream.

With a sigh of relief Ferret turned around, but
started back aghast at sight of Dempsey, who,
clutching a cocked revolver in either hand, glared
ferociously at him.

"Die, you dog!" he hissed, and discharged a
shot point blank at Ferret's head.

CHAPTER XI.

HALEY HEARS THE NEWS.

FOR the first time in his life Ferret was
thoroughly nonplussed.

Strain his eyes as he might, in the vain hope
that he had labored under a delusion, he could not
controvert the fact of two threatening muzzles
placed close to his head.

In the dim light that struggled through the
window Ferret was able to recognize in the man
before him the person who had so intently ex-
amined the dead body at the railway station, a
fact which, combined with his own situation at
the time, convinced him that his antagonist was
one of the gang that he was trying to unearth.

Ferret's revolvers were in his hip pocket, and
he made a movement toward them with his
hand, but halted, as the stern, decisive words
struck his ear:

"Don't move a finger, or you are a dead man!"

A moment's silence, and then Dempsey added,
in the same stern tone:

"Fold your arms!"

Ever ready to take advantage of the most
trivial circumstance, and accustomed to think
and act quickly, Ferret brought his arms around,
as if to fold them, and then, before Dempsey
could well divine his intentions, he sprang for-
ward, and struck him heavily in the stomach,
doubling him up like a jack-knife.

But Dempsey was plucky, and commenced
scrambling to his feet as soon as he had landed
squarely on the floor.

"Now," cried Ferret, "it's my turn. Halt,
or I'll put a bit of lead in your skull. Do you
understand?"

"Yes," was Dempsey's grumbling answer, as
he shrank back from before the frowning muzzle
pointed at him.

He took just one too many backward steps, and
went headlong through the trap-door, bounding
down the steps, and arriving at the bottom
bruised and bleeding.

Aware that in the detective he had caught a
Tartar, and deeming prudence the better part
of valor, he picked himself up and fled precipi-
tately down the other flight of stairs, passing on
the way old Gruggers, who, in his night attire,
and with a candle in his hand, was ascending to
learn what the trouble was; for although he was
willing to have murder committed, he wished it
done quietly, so as not to attract attention from
any chance passer-by, for at heart he was an
arrant coward, and dreaded the consequences of
any known misdeeds.

Villain at heart he was, pure and simple, and had he been possessed of a little more brute courage would have made one of the worst of human devils.

He did not offer to stay Dempsey, but hurried on, and when, standing in the middle of the last flight of stairs, he saw the detective step through the door, he asked, in a quaking voice:

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing," was the detective's sarcastic reply, feeling an itching of his fingers to clutch the old fellow's throat.

"But what was all that noise about?"

Turning sharply on him, Ferret sternly asked:

"Don't you know?"

"No."

"Well, your two friends tried to murder me."

"Murder you?" and Gruggers turned pale and his knees quaked with fear. "I don't know nothing about it."

Ferret scanned his face closely, and although thoroughly convinced at heart that the old man was in the plot, his actions and general appearance of horror or fear misled the detective into thinking that possibly Gruggers was an eminently good man and unable to have anything to do with murder.

This conversation had taken less than two minutes; then remembering his antagonist, and desiring his capture, Ferret brushed by the last and hurried down the stairs.

He had reached the top of the last flight of stairs when he heard the outside door open and shut.

"Gone!" he ejaculated. "Too late!"

Such in truth was the case.

Picking himself up in a half bewildered condition, Dempsey had paused a minute to collect his senses, then had hurried down stairs and out of doors.

His first impulse was to look for Young where he had fallen in the creek, but desisted and sought cover instead when he thought of the nearness of the detective.

Ferret reached the outside door and gazed out into the night, but saw not any trace of the fugitive.

He then turned his attention to the stream, but on hunting around beneath his window, he found neither hide nor hair of Young, who had taken the fearful fall.

Luckily for Young he had fallen into the water at a spot where it was deep, and after performing sundry gyrations in his descent, he was fortunate enough to strike upon his feet.

The distance of the fall and the shock winded him, but did not otherwise hurt him.

"The devil takes care of his own," Young muttered, when satisfied of the wholeness of his skin. "And it's a good thing he does or I'd a been dead long ago."

Knowing not how affairs were going on inside he crawled out of the water and concealed himself among some bushes, and there remained until he saw Dempsey hastily emerge and dash down toward the road, which he reached ere Ferret appeared at the door.

Heading Dempsey off, Young cried:

"Halloo, Dave, old man!"

"Is that you, Sam?"

"Yes."

"But didn't that fall kill you?"

"No."

"And you're all right?"

"As you see," replied Young. "And now what shall we do?"

"In what way?"

"I mean about going to the workshop or staying here to talk lead or steel to this fellow."

"We'd better go back," said Dempsey.

"Why?"

"Because cap is waiting for me."

"Very well," said Young, "then home we'll go;" and so while Ferret was hunting around for them, they were on the road, industriously plodding on toward the rendezvous, where they arrived in the small hours of the morning.

Cap. Haley was up and waiting impatiently for Dempsey's return, and the moment he entered, asked:

"What about Barker?"

"Dead!"

"Dead?" gasped Haley.

"Yes."

"How did it happen?"

Then Dempsey told the story as he had heard it, as well as exhibited the evening paper he had bought, containing an account of the occurrence.

"But what kept you so long?" was Haley's next query.

This necessitated the telling of the discovery by himself that he was being followed; of his meeting with Young, their tracking up of the little man, of the struggle in his chamber, of their return from the mill to the counterfeiters' home.

As Haley listened to the description given of the affair, he grew pale as death, and fairly gasped for breath when Dempsey described the person with whom he had come into contact, as short and dark.

"In fact," said Dempsey, not having noted the effect of his story on Haley, "I think it is the same fellow who tried to arrest Dugan, and whom we pitched off the bridge."

"It is," gasped Haley. "And last night he was tied to the railroad track, and escape seemed impossible. Yet here he is free again and dogging every step we take. That man is a detective; I'm sure of it, and he is dangerous. Boys, he must be murdered!"

Haley used the right word when he said "murdered," for he would not himself have faced the little dark man in a fair fight, and knew full well that his men would not, thus making a blow in secret a necessity.

"He must be gotten rid of somehow," mused Haley. "But how?"

This was a poser.

But Haley got some sort of solution to the problem not long after.

Had Barker been living, any such commission would have been placed in his hands, but that he was dead changed matters entirely, and the only man to whom could be entrusted such a task, was Jerry, the hostler.

So Jerry was called and presented himself before Haley, with the question:

"What's wanted?"

Having been awakened from his sleep, he did not feel particularly amiable, and the question was asked gruffly.

"I want you to do me a favor," said Haley, in bland, insinuating tones.

"What is it?"

In a few words Haley explained what was required of him.

"All right," said Jerry, when he had finished. "I'll do it."

"Go right away," said Haley.

Acquiescing in this, Jerry went out and took a horse from the stable, and after seeing to it that the two huge revolvers he carried were loaded, he started away on a canter.

His mission was murder.

He had received an accurate description of Ferret, and his instructions were to patrol the road, pass the mill, and when he saw a man of the description given, to shoot him down without a moment's warning, for in this way only did Haley suppose their enemy could be gotten rid of.

CHAPTER XII.

FERRET AS A GERMAN.

AFTER satisfying himself that both of the counterfeiters had made good their escape, he turned toward the mill, and had nearly reached the door when once more he was startled by a shrill call, as if for help.

He started with surprise, as he had done some hours previous, then bounded to the door, only to find it locked.

Loudly he rapped on the heavy door, but it was several minutes ere he received a response, and then it was the voice of Gruggers, asking:

"Who is it?"

"Me," replied Ferret. "Let me in."

Gruggers was in doubt what to do; he feared that in some way the attempt at murder would recoil on his head, and so dreaded the entrance of the intended victim, and yet if he did not allow him to enter, he would or could make the neighborhood too hot to hold him.

So as a matter of policy Gruggers opened the door, and Ferret entered.

The old man asked:

"Did you catch them?"

"No."

"That's a pity," said Gruggers, in a tone expressing virtuous indignation; "such villains as them 'ere ought to be caught and hung like—like—dogs," he added, after a short hesitation, adopting the simile for want of a better.

He looked at Ferret to observe the effect of this virtuous outburst, but had he known how little stock was taken in it—had he known who it was in reality that he confronted, he would have quaked and quivered in every separate muscle and tendon in his body.

Gruggers was inwardly chuckling over the supposed success of his speech, when Ferret suddenly shot out the word:

"Gruggers!"

Starting quickly, the evil-visaged old fellow replied:

"Yes."

"Who have you in this house or mill, besides yourself and Mrs. Gruggers?"

"Nobody," he quickly answered.

"Careful now," said Ferret, warningly. "Don't tell me any lies. You may be sorry for it if you do. Now—have—you—anybody—concealed—in—this place? Answer truthfully, or you'll rue it."

There was a stern, decided manner about Ferret's words and looks, that caused the cowardly villain to tremble from head to foot, and he opened his lips several times ere any sound issued from them, and even that was unintelligible, although the detective thought the word was "yes."

But at this juncture Mrs. Gruggers appeared, and glanced from one to the other. Instantly she divined what had passed, but keeping quiet she waited.

"Answer," said Ferret, "have you anybody concealed here?"

"Ha—ha—ha!" broke in Mrs. Gruggers. "Anybody concealed here? Now, that's a good joke! What would we conceal anybody for? Ha—ha—ha! That's rich. No, of course not!"

"Silence, woman!" said Ferret. "I spoke not to you. Answer me, Gruggers, or I'll shoot you," and the detective presented a revolver at his head.

"He daren't shoot you, Tim," cried Mrs. Gruggers, who was more clear-sighted and brave than her husband. "Now answer him once for all, and let him go, and not trouble us any more."

"No," cried Gruggers, spunking up. "I told you no one was 'ere, and I meant h't; so, now?"

and he folded his arms and gazed at Ferret, as much as to say: "What are you going to do about it?"

The detective felt strongly tempted to force matters by making an examination of the building, with or without Grugger's consent, but on second thought he determined to defer it for a—at least, although he felt sure that a human being was kept from sight somewhere in the old mill.

Hours had sped by since Ferret first entered the mill, and by this time day had begun to

had made up his mind as to his next step, turning his back on the inhospitable roof that had sheltered him, he started for the railroad depot; arriving there, he took a train stopping at Fordham, got off at that place, and went to the hotel where he had left his

Going to his room, he remained there about an hour, and then opening the door he stepped out into the hall, first taking care to see that was clear.

A few minutes later there stepped up to the cashier's desk a short man with blue eyes and long flaxen hair; a pair of ordinary glasses surmounted his nose, giving him the air of a professor; handing a key to the cashier he said:

"I gif you dis key for de gentleman vat lives in number nineteen, und here is den dollar until he come vonce more again."

"All right," said the cashier, accepting the key and the money. "I am to give it up to nobody but you or him, is that it?"

"Yah, dat ish id," replied the jolly-looking German, leaving the office and wending his way to the depot.

"There is Barnes," he said, in pure, good English, as the train rolled into the station, "I must see Henry."

Leaving the car he crossed to the house of which Henry was an inmate, and knocked at the door, which was responded to by the virago herself.

She scanned the little German from head to foot, she sniffed contemptuously, and in a haughty tone asked:

"What do you want?"

"I wants to see de young mans vat is sick in your house."

"Who are you?"

"Professor Meyers, from New York."

"Who sent you here?"

"A frent of de young man's, a man schmaller mit pink hair und eyes."

Recognizing the description as that of Ferret, she pointed him to the house, but announced to Henry ere allowing him to enter the sick room.

"Ah! how you vas feeling, eh?" and Professor Meyer crossed to the bedside, rubbing his hands together.

"Nothing," answered Henry.

"Let me feel your pulse," and the professor sat down on the bedside and took hold of Henry's wasted hand, at the same time saying:

"and the woman away."

The difference in the mode of speaking and struck Harry's attention, and he gazed fixedly at the German for several minutes, during the latter pretended to be busily engaged making up the bed's condition.

At his sharp scrutiny, Harry could not keep the mystery, and a puzzled, mystified look came over his face.

"What for?" repeated the German.

"Barnes," said Harry, "will you be so good as to step into the next room a little while, I want to see you when I need you."

After saying something to himself about the pre-

tentions of know-nothing foreigners who stuck their noses where they were not wanted, she left the room.

"Ha—ha—ha!" laughed the jolly German, when the door closed behind her. "Isn't she a Tartar?"

"Yes; and now," said Henry, arising to his elbow, "who and what are you? You are not what you seem."

"What makes you think so?"

"I don't know, but you are playing a part; I'm sure of that. Now who are you?"

"Don't you know me?"

The tone in which the question was asked was quizzical and bantering, and puzzled Henry the more.

"No," he replied.

"Don't you remember the man thrown from the bridge, whom you saved?"

"Yes."

"Well, I am he!"

"You? Impossible!"

"Not so."

"Impossible!" repeated Henry, "for he was dark complexioned, had black hair, and sharp black eyes, while you have light hair and blue eyes."

"It is possible, nevertheless. And now, Henry, I am going to tell you a secret. I am Ferret, the great detective."

Henry had heard of him before, and gazed with widely distended eyes at the man before him.

"And I am after a gang of counterfeiter's, whose headquarters are located within a few miles of this place. They suspected me, and last night I had another narrow escape, so I changed myself as you see. I am going away within an hour. I want you to stay here until you are well and strong. If you do not see me in a week go where you choose, and I will let you hear from me through the address I gave you some time ago."

"All right," said Henry, looking somewhat dubiously at the German, as if yet in doubt as to whether or not he had revealed his true identity; for, as he had asked himself: "how can a man change the color of his eyes?"

"And now," said Ferret, "how are you feeling?"

"A great deal better. I am going to get up later in the day."

"That's good!" said Ferret, with a pleased expression on his face, for he had taken a strong liking to the lad. "But be careful not to over-tax yourself," and rising, he shook hands with Henry, bade him good-by, and left the room, sending Mrs. Barnes in as he went out.

"Well, here I am," mused Ferret, as he stepped into the road, "here I am in a new character. What will be the result of this venture?"

He little dreamed what the result was to be.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN DANGER AGAIN.

OF a truth, Ferret knew but little, and dreamed less of the events that were to transpire within the next forty-eight hours.

It was dusk by the time he was fairly started on the road toward the old mill, which he reached a few hours later.

As he stood in the park opposite the mill, he was passed by a man on horseback, who drew close in toward him, and eyed him sharply, then halted his horse, saying:

"Can you tell me how far it is to Fordham?"

"I cannot," replied Ferret, assuming the German accent again. "I vas lost mineself."

"That's bad," replied the horseman, who was

no other than Jerry. "Git up," to his horse, "we must flounder on until we find out," and he cantered away.

"Now, I wonder who in thunder he was!" mused Ferret. "Wants to know how far he is from Fordham! Well, I guess he knows even better than I do. More mystery—more mystery!" he muttered. "And now to see if I can find out anything about this dark place with its strange inmates."

He crossed to the old mill, and cautiously walked around three sides of it, the fourth being at the side of the stream; and, therefore, impassable.

As he walked, he kept his eyes busy, searching for any ray of light that might come through the boarded-up windows.

But all was dark as Egypt, and still as the solitude of a grave.

Again Ferret passed around the place, and when he had reached the side furthest from the road, he heard a moaning as of a person in distress, broken into now and then by confused sounds of some gruff voice, saying:

"Be quiet, d— you, or I'll cut your throat! Do you hear? Be quiet now!"

Patching the broken words, Ferret was able to make out sentences like the above.

But whence came they?

Listening intently, he concluded that they came from some distance above his head, and, withdrawing a number of feet, he gazed long and earnestly at the great, grey walls.

But it was a dark and dreary blank.

As he ran his eyes along the wall for the dozenth time, it was arrested by the faintest possible streak of light.

"Ah!" he thought, "there is the mystery! Now to unravel it."

He approached the building and examined the walls to learn how much prospect there was of his being able to ascend to where the light was.

The walls of the mill had been constructed of rough-hewn stone, and where the mortar joined the blocks together there were footholds, but slender and dangerous.

First taking off his coat, and the big-rimmed spectacles, he placed his feet on the precarious footing, and commenced ascending.

Step by step he mounted upward, once or twice narrowly missing a tumble to the ground beneath.

As further he advanced the moaning sounded more distinct and clear, and he recognized the harsh voice of Mrs. Gruggers saying:

"If you don't be quiet, you little whining hussey, I'll poison you! Do you hear?"

The only reply was a moaning cry for help.

"You ungrateful jade!" cried Mrs. Gruggers in discordant tones, "I'm going to gag you, and keep you so in future."

"Oh, don't, please don't!" wailed a voice in reply, apparently that of a young girl.

A few feet further and Ferret would be on a level with the roof.

He heard a heavy step across the floor, and then a piteous cry:

"Don't gag me—please don't!"

"Here, now—no whining—open your mouth, or d— you, I'll break your neck. Open your mouth!"

"I won't!" cried the wretched girl, driven to desperation.

"You won't!" almost howled Mrs. Gruggers, just as Ferret placed his eye to the little crack whence had issued the light which attracted his attention.

He saw a sight that made his blood fairly seethe in his veins.

Crouching in the center of the room was a young girl, with arm raised to protect her head

from the cruel blow which she knew would fall—and heavily at that.

Even as Ferret took in the situation the cruel blow was struck by Mrs. Gruggers, whose clenched fist struck the girl in the temple, and rolled her over on the floor groaning with pain.

"I'll teach you," cried the irate Mrs. Gruggers. "I'll teach you to talk back to me. Take that! and that!" and as she spoke she kicked the unresisting, cowering girl. "Now open your mouth!"

With but a dumb moan, the girl opened her lips, and the fiendish woman thrust between her teeth a round piece of hard wood, from each end of which dangled a short piece of string, which, tied together at the back of the girl's head, held the cruel gag in place.

Ferret grew very excited as he watched the horrible proceedings, and was about to shout aloud, when his foothold suddenly gave way, and he went headlong to the ground, and struck so heavily that it deprived him of consciousness.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Gruggers, with a parting kick and a curse, left the unfortunate girl to herself, and went down stairs, just in time to respond to a knock at the door, opening which she was saluted with:

"Well, Mrs. Gruggers, how are you?"

"Oh! it's you, is it, captain?" she said, recognizing the voice.

"Yes."

"Come in."

The villain entered, and the door was closed.

"How's the girl?" was the first question.

"I just left her," was the reply.

"Is she kicking yet?"

"Yes."

"As lively as ever!"

"You bet," answered Mrs. Gruggers, adding a vile oath to the slang remark.

"You treat her kindly, of course?" he said, in a sarcastic way, showing that his words possessed more than one meaning.

"Of course," repeated the beldame. "As kindly as a mother would treat her own."

"That's right. Where's Gruggers?"

"Up stairs somewhere. Oh, there he is now," as he entered.

"I understand two of my men had a little trouble here?"

"Yea."

"They don't suspect my connection with you, do they?"

"Not at all."

"That's good. Now, then, can you show me where Young was tossed from?"

"Yea. Come inside."

Gruggers led the way to the back part of the mill, and was passing on towards the stream, when he stumbled across the body of Ferret. With a quick cry of alarm he bent down.

"What is it?" asked Haley.

"A man."

Ferret had been slowly recovering, and the unintentional kick restored him fully.

Knowing with whom he had to deal, for he recognized the voice of Gruggers, he said, in a maudlin tone:

"Go 'way; let me schleep."

"A drunken Dutchman," said Gruggers.

"Ain't drunk," said Ferret, staggering on his feet.

"We must investigate this fellow," said Haley, in a suspicious tone. "Come inside, my fine fellow."

"Comin'," said Ferret, slipping into his coat, and adjusting his spectacles.

"Who are you?" asked Haley, sharply, as he peered closely at Ferret. "What's your name?"

"Ferret," replied Ferret.

"What's your business?"

Ferret, as the detective took his tongue in

his cheek, and turned knowingly at his questioner, then added:

"I be vat you Americaners calls von artist. I makos goot work mit der bank bills for der government. Vat you dinks of dis?"

At this Haley pricked up his ears, and sending Gruggers away, seeing a possible addition to his gang, he entered into a private conversation with the detective, who soon succeeded in convincing the captain of the counterfeiters that he was the noted German forger and counterfeiter, Becker.

Then Haley cautiously gave away to Ferret his true character, which made the detective's heart leap for joy in the anticipation of speedily being in possession of all the secrets of the gang who had so long defied the efforts of the shrewdest detectives in the New World.

Suffice it that Ferret in his new character consented to become a member of the gang, and that less than an hour later they started for the rendezvous, both in a happy frame of mind, Haley's resulting from the supposed addition of so valuable a member, while the detective's reasons have already been stated.

On they hurried towards the headquarters of the gang, where they arrived late in the night.

Going in, Haley found all the men seated on the floor, playing cards, drinking and smoking.

They looked up in surprise at his companion, who was at once introduced as Becker—the forger.

"I ish very mooch pleased, shentlemans, for to make friends mit you," said Ferret, bowing and smiling to perfection the character of a jolly Dutchman.

He received a less hearty reception, for men of their stamp are very chary to give themselves away, since it sometimes means the closing behind them—to be shut for years—a pair of prison gates.

"Now I'll show you to a bed," said Haley, and leading Ferret to the sleeping room, he designated a couch which he could consider his for the time being.

"Thank you," said the detective, throwing himself on the bed.

After Haley had gone, he took care to conceal such articles as would betray him should they be seen, and then, surrounded by men, who, could they have but surmised his true character, would have ruthlessly cut his throat, he sank into a peaceful slumber.

It was late in the day when he awoke, and getting up he saw that the room was deserted, save for his presence.

Going into the next room, he found all the men gathered there, and although unseen by them, he impressed on his memory indelibly the face of each.

Haley had just been speaking, and stopping but a moment, he resumed:

"To-night, boys, we must go to work once more. For the past few days we have been all upset, but now I hope we will get down to hard work once more. And with Mr. Becker's help, I hope to be able to do our work considerably easier. We will give him a trial after supper."

Ferret had not gone into the thing blindly, and although not a first-class engraver or designer, he was naturally an artist, and thought he could successfully carry out the plan he had undertaken to perform.

At sundown they had supper, and then Ferret was taken charge of by Haley, and conducted through the trap door to the cellar, thence to the wall, and from there into the workshop. Inside the door he paused, and looking admiringly around, he said:

"Vell, dis is mooch nice. Ve haf no such goot places in Germany."

"Now, Becker, said Haley, 'let me see you draw a presentment of this genuine bill.'"

And Haley landed him a new ten dollar greenback.

Ferret sat down at the bench and worked industriously for the space of half an hour, and then he passed the free-hand proof to Haley, who examined it, and then said:

"The best I have ever seen!"

Ferret bowed low in acknowledgement of the compliment, saying, as he took it again:

"Vait for a meenit, and I vill show you something vot is better."

He took the lamp from the bracket, and set it down on the table before him for the benefit of better light.

In bending over his work, he advanced his head too near the lamp, and his hair caught fire.

Haley saw the accident, and jumping forward, he cried:

"Your hair is on fire!" and then clapped his hand over the burning portion to smother the fire; his fingers became entangled in the hair, and when he attempted to withdraw his hand, Ferret's flaxen wig was lifted from his head.

Haley saw it, and instantly shouted, allowing the wig to fall back in its place:

"You are not Becker! Boys, we have a spy among us! Kill him!"

With a bound Ferret was on his feet, but surrounded by threatening faces and frowning revolver muzzles.

"Kill him without noise!" cried Haley. "Knife him, somebody!"

Jack Dugan made a vicious lunge at him, which Ferret avoided by taking a backward spring on the working table; they crowded forward ready to destroy him, but hastily drawing and holding in either hand a revolver, he cried:

"Back—back, I say, or by the gods I'll put a bullet through your skulls!"

For a minute or two the counterfeiters were held in check by his pluck, and decided tones and fierce manner; but only for a moment, for six or seven to one, as they were, they could well afford to assume the aggressive.

As they advanced Ferret held himself in readiness, and when all were close by he took a flying leap over their heads and landed near the secret door.

Placing his back toward the door, he fired, and crack—crack—crack—crack, with right and left revolvers, and the lights were out, leaving the place in total darkness.

"Good God, boys, don't let him escape!" screamed the agitated Haley.

Ferret fumbled around the door, seeking for the fastening, but alas, it seemed impossible to find.

A groan fell from his lips, for he knew that he must escape or suffer a horrible death at the hands of ravenous, blood-thirsty human wolves.

But—ah!—he struck the secret spring when he thought all hope gone.

Exulting in heart, he clutched the spring even as his neck was clutched in the strangling grasp of two brawny hands.

He groaned again, for all hope of escape had vanished.

CHAPTER XIV.

FERRET ESCAPES.

ALL hope of escape seemed gone when that detaining grasp was placed on Ferret's shoulder; but his was not one of those minutes that easily succumb, and with freedom so nearly within his reach, he would not give up.

Wrenching loose from the hand that held it, he swung open the secret door and jumped into the

which was conducted to the workshop the detective had carefully noted the direction he took, and had even counted the number of paces from the foot of the stairs to the secret door.

This now stood him in hand, for he knew exactly where the stairs were situated, and bounded forward without a moment's hesitation; he found the stairs, and hurried up them.

For a moment after he had left the workshop the counterfeiters paused, and then urged on by Haley's cry of:

"Catch him, boys, and knife him!" they started in pursuit, with drawn knives whose keen blades meant death to Ferret, should they be sheathed in his body.

By the time the detective had gone half-way up the cellar stairs, they were at the foot, and Ferret knew full well how narrow even yet were the chances of escaping.

He reached the top of the stairs as a hurried tramp of feet overhead warned him that the inhabitants of the house were astir, having been alarmed by the sounds of the conflict; they approached the trap-door through which he must pass, and Ferret immediately saw that he must literally fight his way to liberty.

Placing his hands against the door, he gave it a sudden upward and backward swing, and then taking the last step he stood on the floor confronting Jerry, who had just returned from his vigil on the road, and who, hearing the noise and suspecting trouble, had taken the trouble to unsheath a long-bladed knife.

At sight of Ferret he started, and cried:

"The man I met by the mill."

"Jerry—Jerry!" called Haley from below, in frenzied tones. "Don't let that man escape. He's a spy."

"All right!" cried Jerry, "I'll fix him; ah—my boy. I've got you."

As Jerry finished speaking, he sprang at Ferret, and using his disengaged hand, clutched the detective's throat and bore him to the floor.

Near by stood the hag, blear-eyed Mag, who laughed gleefully as Jerry's onslaught was met with success; but his triumph was only momentary, for by a sudden spasmodic action Ferret drew his knees up under Jerry, and gave him a quick upward fling that sent him flying through the air.

Jerry howled dismally as this plan was worked on him, and Mag joined in the chorus.

The two men were upon their feet at the same instant, and glaring fiercely at each other.

Jerry was a big, brawny fellow, weighing one-half more than Ferret, and easily twice as strong; at what the detective lacked in strength and he made up in greater activity.

The latter quality enabled him to reach the trap-door and slam it shut just as the rising heads of the uppermost men were in a position to receive a headache-producing thwack before Jerry could interfere.

Among those struck by the heavy door was Haley, who sat up a lusty yelling, and, wild with apprehension, he shouted:

"Jerry—Jerry! Kill him—kill him! knife him! Kill him, somehow!"

But Jerry already had advanced to the attack, and making murderous slashes with his knife, he laid in on the detective, who stood on the trap-door to prevent further pursuit by those below.

Ferret knew that he was in for some tough work, and prepared to meet it manfully.

With the butt of his revolver the detective knocked the knife from Jerry's hand, at the same time losing his own weapon; seeing this, Jerry at once closed in, and a few minutes later the men were locked firmly together, wrestling with all their strength, Ferret trying to keep on the door,

while his antagonist sought to force him to another quarter of the room.

Fiercely did they struggle, while from below came Haley's fear-burdened cries of command to Jerry, who, gaining an advantage, forced the detective down on his knees.

In this position Ferret was nearly helpless, but wrenching loose one hand, he dealt Jerry a fearful blow in the stomach that doubled him up like a jack-knife.

But even in this condition the villain proved himself plucky, for he retained a desperate grasp on the detective, and finally succeeded in dragging him off the door.

Blear-eyed Mag had watched the fight without moving a step, but seeing Ferret about to plant his fist once more in Jerry's stomach, she seized a chair by its back, and whirling it above her head, she sprang forward, aiming a terrific blow at Ferret's head.

To reach the combatants she had to cross the space occupied by the trap-door; finding the weight removed, the imprisoned counterfeiters suddenly raised it as Mag had arrived within a single step of it; the result was that as the chair was wrenched from her grasp by her sudden effort to stop, and went flying toward the struggling foes, she went headlong through the trap-door, yelling like sin, and landing plumply on the heads of the counterfeiters, carried them all into a confused pile at the foot of the stairs.

The chair flying forcibly from Mag's hands, struck both Ferret and Jerry, cutting a deep gash in the head of the former and rendering the latter almost senseless.

The detective was not long in taking advantage of the opportunity, and after a short struggle managed to break away from his antagonist's desperate clutch; Jerry sprang to his feet even as the counterfeiters in the cellar did the same, and as they commenced ascending the steps, plucky but misguided Jerry began to force the fight again.

Just as Haley's head appeared through the trap-door, Ferret dealt Jerry a stunning blow, that finished the work that the chair commenced, for it sprawled the villain on the floor senseless.

Ferret glanced about him, a wild, hunted look in his eyes.

He bounded to the door, seized the knob, turned it, and tried to open the door, which, however, yielded not to his touch, for it was secured above and below by the heavy bolts, which he had not time to draw, for his enemies were within a few feet of him.

A groan escaped his lips.

From those of Haley came an exultant cry, for he thought now that the detective was surely within his murderous grasp.

But he had reckoned without his host, for not yet had the lion-hearted detective given up.

"Come on, boys!" shouted Haley, "now! rush at him; kill him or capture him!"

The counterfeiters rushed forward in a body, bent upon taking the detective's life, as was evinced by their glaring eyes, set teeth, and flourished weapons.

Ferret stirred not until they arrived nearly within arm's length; then he bounded across the apartment with the speed of a frightened deer.

Haley divined his purpose and wildly screamed:

"Shoot him, somebody! Shoot him!"

Straight toward a window Ferret made, and reaching a spot within a few feet of it he paused, and gathering himself, flung his arms over his head to protect it, and then, as a sharp report rang out he crashed through glass and sash, landing in a doubled up position on the ground outside.

"My God!" he gasped. "I'm shot."

Wild, fearfully wild was the excitement among

the counterfeiters, who dashed to the door and with feverish eagerness began undoing the fastenings.

Meanwhile the detective had arisen to his feet, and well knowing the value of time, he ran, or rather staggered rapidly along toward the woods.

The bullet had entered his side, and striking a rib had glanced off and come out in front, inflicting a serious but not fatal wound, from which the blood was flowing in such a stream that each minute he felt himself growing weaker.

Panting for breath he staggered on.

He heard the confusion and noise of opening the door, but never looking behind, he eagerly, rapidly fled.

Reaching the woods he plunged into the underbrush, feeling for the moment comparatively safe.

But he dared not stop; he must pursue his flight, must put more space between his enemies and himself; he must continue, for he knew that soon he would be unable to do so.

He heard the tramp of feet behind and his face blanched a little, for he knew that death would be the portion meted out for him should he be caught, but at length, unable from sheer exhaustion to take another step, he sank down, and with the crashing sounds of enemies' feet, and the ringing, murderous voices singing in his ears, he lost consciousness.

For some hours the frightened counterfeiters beat that woods in search of the detective, whom they knew had been wounded, for he had left bloody traces where he had fallen outside of the window; searched closely, for they knew their safety depended on making away with the man who knew their secrets and who had penetrated into their rendezvous.

As luck had it, Dugan, hurrying to and fro, chanced upon a few drops of blood which had fallen as Ferret fled; following the direction they pointed out he finally came across the still, lifeless-looking body of the plucky but unfortunate detective.

A shrill whistle soon drew several near-by companions to the spot, among whom was Haley, pale-faced and trembling, who, at sight of the body, fairly danced with joy.

Stepping forward, the counterfeiting gang's leader stooped beside the body, felt it, then looked up, a satisfied smile on his evil countenance, saying:

"Boys, he is dead."

"Dead!" repeated Dugan.

"Yes."

"Well," with a shrug of his shoulders, "then he won't bother us any more."

"Not much," said Haley, "and moreover we are safe again. Had this man escaped, bearing with him the secret of our shop, it would have been all day with us. That was a lucky shot of yours, my boy," slapping on the shoulder he who had fired the shot as Ferret went through the window.

"What's to be done?" asked Dugan. "Hadn't we better hide the body?"

"A good idea," said Haley. "Stick it in under the pile of brush," pointing at a heap of debris near. "But hold on, boys, let's throw the body into the little gully yonder, there it will never be found."

"A good idea," said Dugan. "Here, Young, take hold with me."

As Dugan spoke he bent down and took hold of the detective's shoulders.

His hand slipping struck the pale face of the detective, and Dugan at once was struck by its remarkable warmth if it belonged to a dead man.

"I don't believe this fellow is dead," he remarked, looking up at Haley.

"Yes, he is," was the reply. "He's as dead as a door nail. And anyhow, if he wasn't, to be tossed into the gully would kill him; so go ahead."

"Better knife him," suggested Dugan.

"No; do as I tell you," said Haley. "Throw him into the gully."

Thus ordered, Dugan and Young took up the light form of Ferret, and carried it a distance of several hundred feet to the edge of a gully, which in character was like those ordinarily met in a hilly, wooded country. The gully was perhaps forty feet deep, but so dense was the growth of trees and brush, that standing on the edge, all that could be seen below was a sea of green in summer time, and a scene of desolation in winter.

Haley had followed with a slower tread, and was some distance away when Dugan and Young reached the edge with their burden.

"Now," said Dugan. "One—two—"

They gave the body several preliminary swings to and fro.

"Three!"

Letting go, the body went crashing down through the tree tops, and disappeared from sight, and a thud was heard just as Haley coming in sight, exclaimed:

"Don't throw the body down yet. I want to see it."

But it had already gone, and then lay somewhere—perhaps crushed and mangled.

CHAPTER XV.

HENRY'S RECOVERY.

AT sight of the pale faced lad Mrs. Barnes' usually hard, set features would relax into an expression of pity.

The step of her cringing, hen-pecked husband became more elastic day after day.

In his mind the simple-hearted station master blessed Henry fervently, and almost prayed that his sickness might last forever.

After Ferret's visit in the guise of Professor Meyer, the German doctor, the physician who had first attended Henry paid him several visits, at the last of which he said:

"My lad, I'm glad to say that you will no longer need my services, if you are careful of yourself. I have done all I can, and all you want now is quiet and rest for a few days, and then I'll guarantee you as sound and good as a new man."

"That's good news," said Henry, in tones ringing with happiness.

"That it is," said Mrs. Barnes, smiling benignantly down on him.

The doctor left, and although Henry was glad to see him go, looking at him professionally, he was also sorry to see the form of the good-humored, cheerful, straightforward, every man vanish from sight.

Day after day, hour after hour, even, Henry improved for the better, and the fourth day after Ferret's visit, he was able to sit up for some hours.

The next day he walked around the house, and on that following he ventured out of doors.

Mrs. Barnes was delighted at this rapid improvement, the sight of which kept her in the best of humor, and made her so gracious to her husband that he fairly skipped for joy, and when alone with Henry he said confidentially:

"This is living! I always knew that Mrs. Barnes was a good woman, only her temper had got soured somehow. I tell you I'm proud of her now."

"You have cause to be," replied Henry, smiling to himself as he thought of the true state of affairs.

Just then the rustling of a dress announced the arrival of the dame herself.

She glanced inquiringly from one to the other as much as to ask of what they had been talking.

Barnes knew that look and understood it well; so without halting, he said, gaily:

"You came just too late, my dear."

"Why? Too late for what?"

"To hear the good things said about you."

"About me?" she queried, in attempted surprise.

"Yes," said Henry. "Mr. Barnes has just been telling me what an excellent woman you are and how proud he is of you."

Mrs. Barnes smiled with genuine pleasure, while her husband coloring up, stammered out:

"You—said—you—thought so, too."

"So I do," quickly added the lad.

"You honor me too highly," said the delighted dame, smoothing down the front of her dress with both hands, a way many women have of expressing their satisfaction.

"Not a bit of it!" protested the station-master. "Not a bit of it! Isn't that so, my boy?"

"It is."

Ten days had passed since Ferret's last visit, and Henry began to be troubled deeply about his non-appearance.

He was by this time able to go out and around, so he determined to loiter about no longer, but to go to New York and call at the address given him by the detective.

So bidding the station-master and his wife good-bye, he took the train and was soon swiftly rolling in the direction of New York.

As authorized by Ferret he went and drew some money, it being given to him without a single questioning word.

He next went to a cheap hotel and hired a room for one night, and it then being late in the afternoon, he procured a light supper and then proceeded to his room, only stopping on the way to procure pens, ink and paper.

Sitting down, he wrote as follows:

"DEAR MOTHER: For the first time since parting from you am I able to send you word that I have met with success. I cannot tell you all that has passed nor what may happen in the near-by future; but this I say, be of good cheer, for if luck stands by me I will soon be able to take you from that wretched hole and give you a decent home. I would enclose you some money only I know the keeper would take it away from you. As it is, keep up a brave heart and hope for the best. I enclose a card on which is an address where a letter will reach me. And now, good-night. HENRY."

This was enclosed in an envelope together with the card mentioned, and addressed to

"MRS. HANNAH DECKER,

"Care of Damon Brown, Poormaster,
Clarkstown, N. Y."

The address revealed the fact that Henry's mother was an inmate of a poorhouse.

"Poor woman!" mused Henry. "If I had only money enough she would live in luxury the few remaining years of her life. Well, perhaps I may have the means in time—who knows?"

Sighing, he sealed the letter, put on a stamp, and, going out, dropped it in a street lamp box.

As he was about to turn away he noticed two men within a few feet of him. The apparent earnestness of their manner of addressing each other riveted his attention, and without really eavesdropping he heard one say:

"I'm glad he's out of the way, but he was not a detective."

The word detective caused Henry to prick up his ears, and he followed the speakers, who evidently thought themselves secure against being overheard.

"And I say, Dechaz, that he was," was the tart reply of the other.

"Very well," said Dechaz, shrugging his shoulders, "but there's not a man of the description you give, on the force, nor is there one missing."

"Say no more. You saw to getting Kate liberated?"

"Yes."

"And she is free now?"

"Yes. She is going to take the train for Fordham to-morrow, and wants to be met there, for she wants to see Dugan."

"All right, I'll have Jerry go to meet her."

"How are affairs coming on at the shop?"

"First rate; we ran off the press fifty thousand dollars in fives on the Waukegan Bank, last night."

"That's good. When do you go back?"

"On the 7:20 to-morrow morning."

Satisfied with what he had caught of the foregoing conversation, Henry dropped behind, muttering to himself:

"I see through it now. Ferret has been tracking you, and you have made away with him. And Dugan," he said, reflectively, repeating the name a number of times; "it sounds familiar. Ah! I remember the story now—he is the counterfeiter who escaped from jail, was tracked by Ferret on the bridge, and rescued by his companions. He expects to go on the 7:20 train, and so do I!"

Returning to the hotel, he left word at desk to be awakened at six the next morning, and then went to his room, undressed, tumbled into bed, to shortly afterward fall into a sound sleep.

Being awake at six, he jumped up, washed, dressed, and got something to eat, after which he repaired to the depot, and when the 7:20 train started, it carried with it, sitting very near each other, Henry and Haley.

At Fordham they got out, and Haley went to the house on the hill, a proceeding which Henry did not fully understand, as he had learned that the house had formerly been occupied by the lately deceased squire, whose name, by some strange coincidence, he bore.

"This gives me a chance to show what good I am as a detective," thought Henry, and with the patience of a cat at a rat hole, he lay in a piece of shrubbery and waited for Haley's advent.

This occurred later in the afternoon, when he appeared, and shortly afterwards rode out of the grounds on horseback.

Henry's first impulse was to hurry into the village and hire a horse at the stable, but a moment's reflection showed him that the village was too far away; yet he did not let Haley get out of his sight, and so followed on foot, being able to keep the rider in sight, as he only allowed his horse to go on at a slow walk.

The afternoon waned slowly, and an hour after starting darkness began to descend and cover the face of the earth.

Haley now started his horse at a more rapid pace, but Henry breaking into a run, managed to hold his ground.

For some time things continued in this way, then Haley started afresh and soon distanced his pursuer, who, however, pluckily onward, although his game was one of sight and nearly hearing.

Finally he could no longer even be seen, and Henry, nearly winded, took things easier.

Passing along, he chanced to look at a pile looming up some distance from the road, which was, in fact, the old mill, when he started, as a shrill scream broke on his ear.

He stopped and waited.

A moment of silence, and then a pair of shutters were thrown back, and a lithe figure, clad in white, was framed in the window for a moment while she uttered a piercing scream; then a pair of arms seized her and she was drawn forcibly back, and the light extinguished, and the shutters closed, after which silence reigned.

SECOND PART.

CHAPTER I.

THE WILD WOMAN OF THE WOODS.

To the same little, densely wooded spot that Ferret had been thrown in, we will transport the reader, at least in imagination.

Through the undergrowth ran a number of distinct paths, to follow which, one would be obliged to go down on hands and knees.

At a point where two paths intersected there bubbled up from the ground a tiny pool of water; from this little spring ran just the smallest possible rivulet, which bent and twisted and wound its course in a narrow channel between the dense green wall.

Crouching beside the stream, almost totally concealed by the brush, was a strange looking creature.

Judging by the attire worn, it would have been impossible to say whether the being was man or woman; human the person certainly was, but little more could be said, as she was taking the smooth face as the best advantage, and concluded it to be a woman.

In her hand she held tightly a stick, unlike a cane, excepting being much thinner.

The reason of her presence there, her wildness, the painful silence she maintained was apparent when there came out of the brush near her a fat and sleek looking man.

He had evidently come to the stream for a drink.

Nearer and nearer he approached the woman, who, holding her breath, clutched her stick more firmly.

Finally the rabbit came within reach.

Instantly the scene changed.

The stream took the attitude of the woman, and merged into stillness as if by magic.

the startled rabbit could flee, a laid him dead almost at her

Muttering out her satisfaction, she reached out her hand and seized her game, put it with three others she held in her hands, and started off, taking the path to the left of the spring; considering the necessarily crouching position, she made rapid progress, as she bounded along something in the manner of a kangaroo.

With her legs drawn up under her, she would touch her hands, swing a moment, and then shoot suddenly forward.

She advanced along the path until a point was reached where it seemed to end, for a solid green wall interposed itself.

But she paused not at all; but approaching the wall of brush, she put her hands in it, and separating them, a large aperture became visible.

Entering through this, the reader would have found himself in a very *bijou* of a hut, which had been formed by first pulling up or cutting down the brush for the distance of eight or nine feet, and then drawing the tallest of the bushes from either side, tightly interlacing their tops.

Looking more closely at this novel roof, a close observer would have noticed that it was strengthened and made water-proof by a closely made network of brush, whose manufacture dated back so far in the past that it was dry as bone and as brittle.

The sides had also been made in the same way, and taken altogether, the hut showed that considerable ingenuity had been used in its construction.

That this was the habitation of this strange woman was evidenced by the fact that hanging against one side were a number of culinary utensils.

After glancing around when once inside, the newly appearing woman muttered:

"Now I must get to work."

Rolling up her sleeves, she took from a pocket a clasp knife; opening this she sharpened it on a stone, and then proceeded to skin the rabbits.

She had skinned two and was about half done with the third, when without an instant's warning, there came a heavy crash on the roof, the little hut was shaken violently in every part, and wild with fright the woman sprang to her feet and glanced quickly here and there; there came a crackling, snapping noise, the roof sagged down, then broke, and a dark object fell to the earthen floor and rolled to her feet.

With a startled, alarmed cry she sprang back, and with breast heaving she gazed at the motionless object.

Gaining courage, she took a step nearer, then another, and finally a third; then she bent and placed her hand on it, and withdrawing it, found it to be covered with blood other than that of the

"It is a man—bleeding and wounded."

she uttered in a self-explanatory manner; then growing alarmed again, she cried:

"What can he want here? Is he searching for me?"

But very soon it struck her that any man in of her would not make his advent in so unbecoming a manner, and gaining courage again knelt by his side, and placed a hand above

"Dead—dead!"

Saying this, she drew back, and squatting on the floor, she bent her head in her hands, and kept it there until a faint moan caught her at-

In a second she was at the man's side, and in another her hand was once more above his heart, and to her great joy she discovered that it was faintly beating.

"He lives—he lives!" she gasped.

A tin pail stood near by containing water, which she dashed into the man's face, and then commenced chafing his hands, head and legs, in successive order.

The result of this treatment was the opening of the poor fellow's eyes, which spoke the thanks his lips did not or could not utter.

Lifting him as if he were but a child, the odd-looking woman carried him to one corner, where a soft bed of leaves was spread; on this she placed him, and then continued chafing his head and limbs.

The new comer was none other than Ferret, the little detective.

When he had given out in that flight for life, and fallen, unconsciousness had ensued; in this condition he remained for some time, and then he became conscious of hearing the twitter of birds in the trees around him, and felt the breezes playing over his body.

He was conscious of a weak, queer feeling of lassitude, which prompted him to lie still, but remembering what had occurred, and knowing how liable he was to discovery, he determined to seek safer quarters, and made an attempt to unclose his eyes, but to his astonishment he could move not even an eyelash. He then tried to move his arm, but that, too, was devoid of the power of motion. He next tried to stir his legs, his head, his feet, fingers and toes, but found it impossible.

"Good God!" he thought, "what is the matter? Is this a living death?"

Then he recollected of having read of similar cases, in several of which living persons had been buried as dead:

There was no doubt about the matter—he was in a state of syncope; living, sensible, yet destined to drift into death's embrace, unless by some sudden shock circulation was restored from its suspended action.

It was a truly horrible condition.

Time sped by and he heard footsteps approaching, heard the words of Dugan as he discovered his body, heard Haley pronounce him dead, heard the suggestion to throw him into the gully, heard the brutal words of Dugan:

"Better knife him!" at which his soul trembled with horror.

Living, yet dead!

Imagination cannot conceive the frightfulness of Ferret's situation.

He distinctly felt the hands that took hold of him and carried him to the gully's edge; was conscious of being swung back and forth, felt himself falling headlong and crashing through the tree-tops; his last sensation was that of bringing up violently against some obstruction, and then the world once more faded from his view.

CHAPTER II.

FERRET CONVALESCENT.

JUST at the juncture that the detective went crashing downward through the tree tops, it will be remembered Haley came in sight and called to Dugan to wait, but his order reached them just too late.

"Hang the luck," growled Haley. "I wanted to go through him before you chucked him into the gully. Why didn't you stop when I called?"

"Why didn't you call sooner," was Dugan's retort, he not half liking the tone used by Haley, who, not wishing to fall out with any of his men, took another track and remarked, quietly:

"Well, it's done now and can't be helped, so we won't say any more about it. But it was careless in me not to have thought sooner of searching his pockets to see if we could find out who he was."

"I can tell you."

Turning toward Dempsey, who it was had spoken, Haley asked:

"Who was it?"

"The same fellow that you chucked off the bridge, the same cuss you tied to the railroad track."

"Nonsense," said Dugan. "Why, that fellow had black hair, and—"

"This fellow wore a wig," interrupted Dempsey.

"Hold up a minute," and Dugan spoke in an impatient tone. "The detective, if such he was had black eyes, this fellow had blue ones. How do you account for that?"

"But," urged Dempsey, "in height and build they are alike as two peas."

"That may be," said Dugan in a patronizing way; "but black's black and blue's blue. How do you account for that?"

Dempsey could offer no explanation whatever, and although he mumbled to himself he returned no audible answer to the question, it being indeed a poser for smarter and sharper men than he was.

Haley had listened in silence to this little dispute, which when first opened caused a ripple of fear to thrill his heart, but as Dugan proceeded he grew calmer, satisfied of the non-identity of the man in black with the professed German forger.

And yet this in itself caused him to feel uneasy, for if the man in black was yet living he felt that he must be cautious in all his movements.

But the more he thought of the matter the more confused he became.

Why, in reality, could the pretended Becker have been?

A detective? If Dechaz could be depended on, the answer must be "no."

And yet, if such were not the case, what interest could the man have had in joining them, and why would he have traveled about so well armed?

It puzzled Haley deeply.

"Oh, d— it all," he muttered, "it's all a mystery—all a mystery, and can't be solved by me. What in thunder will be the result?"

He could not give an answer to the question, and yet, could he have seen into the future, he would have learned that he would be in possession of it before many weeks had winged their swift flight.

For the sake of satisfying some of his doubts he proposed a descent into the gully and a search for the body, but being opposed by Dugan, who laughed to scorn the possibility of the man's being able to harm them in future, it was given up in itself a most fortunate thing, for had the search been made, Ferret found, and his pockets examined, the counterfeiters would not have hesitated in making the detective's entrance into eternity a fixed fact, which would have given our story a far different ending.

Little did Dugan dream of the service he was doing for Ferret, and in a still less degree did the detective suppose that he owed the little life remaining in him to the distastefulness of Dugan.

There is no sentence more wisely written than that of Shakespeare: "There is a divinity doth shape our ends, rough hew them how we will."

"Let's go back now and get to work," suggested Dugan, and forthwith they began retracing their steps in the direction of their rendezvous.

As Ferret crashed through the roof of the queerly-constructed hut, the syncope was broken by the sudden jar, which started the blood once more through his veins, although he at the same time drifted off into unconsciousness.

After several half returns he finally awoke in a complete state of sensibility, the first thing he noticed being the bed of leaves on which he was lying.

Partially turning his head, his eyes encountered the person of the wild woman of the woods.

He slowly raised his eyes until they rested on those of his strange companion.

Ferret saw her start in surprise, and noticed that she gazed more fixedly at him.

What had she seen to cause the look of astonishment which covered her face?

Simply this: that while one of her visitor's eyes was light blue, the other fairly scintillated in jetty blackness.

"What's the matter?" Ferret weakly asked.

"Your eyes are so queer," was the reply.

A look of intelligence shot across the detective's features, and he opened and closed his eyelids rapidly for a second or two as if to satisfy himself of something, after which he muttered:

"I must have lost it, or had it knocked out."

Turning his face away, Ferret raised a hand to the blue eye, kept it there for a moment, then removed it, and faced the woman.

She started back once more in surprise, this time intermingled with fear, for the blue eye had become jet black!

Seeing her trepidation of manner, the detective said:

"Do not be frightened, and now tell me who you are!"

At this abrupt question the woman moved uneasily, and glanced quickly around her, as if more than willing to fly the spot, then halted, looked at the detective closely and then replied:

"Nobody!"

"But you must be somebody."

"No—no!" she said, hurriedly. "I'm nobody—nobody!"

Ferret looked sharply at the woman, and from her speech and appearance mentally concluded that she was crazy, and so said, in a good-humored tone:

"Well, we won't quarrel, Mrs. Nobody. Now, have you some water here?"

"I'll get some," she said, and seizing a tin pail she hurried away, but shortly returned with it full of water, taking a drink of which he found it to be deliciously cool.

He was about trying to wash the bullet wound, when she asked:

"Won't you let me help you?"

"Yes," he answered, "help indeed."

After waiting to get his shirt from above the wound, she carefully washed away the blood which collected and lined around the entrance the broken bullet had made in entering, as well as another where it had broken through the flesh in leaving his body.

He had feared that the bullet had lodged in his body, and when he learned that such was not the case, he felt much easier in mind, as he knew that no mortal or dangerous spot had been reached.

Loss of blood made him weak, and he knew that a few days would necessarily pass before he would be able to leave the roof that sheltered him.

Mrs. Nobody, for so he continued calling the woman, although not a good nurse, was willing and anxious, and properly told him that was no account of her, which was quite as well, as Ferret knew precisely what should be done, having been wounded similarly in former years.

For several days he remained pretty well, either thinking or sleeping, or talking to his old companion who seemed almost constantly with preparations for Ferret's departure.

Right outside of the hut she had a small stove, and on this she prepared some excellent broth for the sick man.

As he grew stronger, she gave him rabbit, roasted, stewed, or fricasseed, beside new sweet bread, berries, and now and then a broiled bird, or some other tid-bit.

Almost unconsciously to herself, even her fear of Ferret began to lessen, and she began to feel confidence in him, and so, when one day after he had been her guest for nearly a week, and again asked her who she was, she replied—voice and manner contradicting his assumption that she was unsound mentally:

"I told you I was nobody, and it was the truth, for neither I am."

"One more question; how do you manage to live?"

"Very easily. This hut shelters me and keeps me as dry as any house I ever lived in. In the summer season the berries that grow wild along here, taken with the birds and small game I capture, support me well."

"But how do you get flour, and matches, and such articles?"

"In this way: When the spring season opens, I begin catching rabbits. The meat I dry, and so preserve it. The skins, as well as those of muskrats and other small animals which I occasionally capture, I cure and keep until fall. Then I make my yearly trip to a store some distance from here, and dispose of the skins in exchange for such necessities as I must have. So you see I provide for everything."

"But why do you lead such a life?" queried Ferret, with pardonable curiosity.

This pointed question seemed to arouse her fears afresh, and she looked long and fixedly at the questioner.

"Do not fear me," said Ferret. "I mean you no harm."

"First promise me one thing. Never to tell a living being of my presence in this place."

"I promise," was the reply he gave.

"I will believe you," she said, slowly, "but I cannot tell you all the story. Years ago in an unguarded moment, I did something that made me amenable to the law. When found out I implored the man I had wronged to forgive me, but uttering a most frightful oath, he swore to hunt me from the face of the earth. I was dazed, stunned; he turned his back on me for a moment; seeing the chance, I fled past him, made my way to these woods, found my way into this gully, and trembling with fear, I lived here day after day, subsisting on fruits and berries. After a while I thought of building a shelter for myself, and this, though it has been fixed and refixed, is the result. Here I have lived long and dreary years, leaving the gully but once a year, and then only under cover of darkness, and when I return it is only shrouded by night's cloak. Several times persons have caught glimpses of me, and once I heard a conversation about the wild woman of the woods, which, no doubt, was an allusion to myself. And this is my story."

Ferret had been an interested listener to this strange tale, and looking at the high, pale face and head of the woman, he could easily understand how the fear of the shame attendant upon an exposure of her crime would drive her to live the life of a recluse, of a hermit.

"I am very—very sorry for you," and Ferret's tone was filled with genuine sympathy.

"Thank you," she said, her voice showing her appreciation of his kind words.

"Perhaps your persecutor is dead," suggested Ferret, speaking after a few minutes spent in deep thought.

"Ah! no, such would not be my fortune," she

sadly replied. "Besides, I have nowhere to go if I left this spot. No, here I have lived for years past, this is my home, and in it I shall live and die."

"But, my good woman," urged Ferret, "will you not tell me the name of the man who drove you from civilization's bounds by bitter persecution?"

She paused a moment thoughtfully, then said: "I will; it was Squire Beebe; Henry Beebe, of Fordham."

CHAPTER III.

THE FAIR CAPTIVE.

AFTER the heavy shutters had been closed, and the old mill put on its usual dark, deserted air, Henry stood still in the road, undecided how to act.

"It's clear that the girl is in trouble," he thought. "Clear that she is kept in that place against her will, that she is a prisoner."

His first impulse was to go boldly up to the door of the mill and demand an explanation, but a moment's reflection convinced him that to do anything of the kind would be useless, since the probabilities were that he could not forcibly enter, and of course the inmates would not peaceably allow him to make a search, if there was any dark work to be concealed, of which fact the lad was morally sure.

He next thought of hurrying to the nearest justice of the peace, and getting out a search-warrant; but could he get such a warrant without having any evidence, further than a bare suspicion, to base its necessity upon?

"I'll get the evidence," thought Henry. "I'll reconnoiter the place, get proofs in my possession, and then get the warrant."

Resolved to act upon this idea, he carefully approached the building until he stood directly beneath the window at which the figure of the despairing girl had momentarily appeared.

Looking up he saw that all was dark within, and not a sound broke the stillness, the silence being almost death-like in character.

About ten feet away was the entrance, and this was opened suddenly within several minutes after Henry's arrival beneath the window. At once the lad sank back in the shadow of a buttress which had been built long after the mill had been erected, evidently as a support to a weakening wall.

It was Tim Gruggers who stepped from the entrance; cautiously advancing a few feet, he looked keenly in all directions, and passing bent his head and listened for sounds of any person who possibly might have been attracted by the girl's escapade; he advanced to the buttress, and even rested his hand against the side opposite to that which concealed Henry, who had meanwhile shrunk as close to the wall as possible.

Fearing a possible discovery, he had drawn a revolver which he held tightly in his hand, determined in case of attack to give the aggressors a dose of cold lead.

But Gruggers, apparently satisfied, turned around, walked slowly to the door, and disappeared within the dark interior.

Breathing free, Henry stepped out as he heard the door closed, and once more glanced upward to the window to which he had intended to make an ascent; he, however, found it much further than Ferret had, for the latter's ascent had been made at the back of the mill, where less pains had been taken to have the wall smooth than the front.

Although Tim and his wife saw no apparently drunken German taken into Henry's confidence, they themselves were slightly suspicious of him. Tim, by his own warlike, partly military, and they had a vague idea of the true state of

a possibility that the German was climbing up to the window just prior to his being discovered: the result was, as we have seen, the changing of the room of the captive.

Hugging the buttress tightly, Henry climbed slowly upward; several times he came near tumbling headlong to the ground, saving himself in each instance only by, to use an old phrase, hanging on by teeth, eyebrows and toenails.

He had but a few feet further to go, when he heard a faint moaning as of some one in pain; instantly he paused and listened.

There came a confused hum of voices, and one sentence he distinguished was:

"Take it out if she says she'll not give any more trouble."

Then he could hear some questions asked, to which, as reply, a faint moan was given, which, so far as he could tell, might have been assent, or to the contrary.

With as little noise as possible he reached out his hand, clutched the window-sill, and drew himself up to it; after this he heard a few words addressed to the girl, which the intonation showed to be admonitory and threatening, and then came the sound of feet shuffling across the floor, and the noise of a door closing at the far side of the apartment.

Waiting for a few minutes, Harry pursed up his lips, and gave a soft, low whistle.

Hearing no response, he repeated it after an interval of several minutes, and shortly after he whistled a third time.

Following this he heard sounds as of some one stirring, and then came a faint tap at the shutter.

To this Henry replied without hesitation.

Then came the low words, spoken in a soft, melancholy, thrilling voice.

"Who are you?"

"A friend," was Henry's reply.

"A friend? Have I one in the world?"

"You have. Now who are you? and what is your condition?"

"I am kept here forcibly at the instance of a cruel man, who will destroy me unless I agree to marry him. Can you help me to escape?"

"I will try my best. How many men are there here?"

"About one."

"That is all; but there is another person here, Mrs. Gruggers, who in cruelty and ferocity is far more than her husband."

Learning that he had but a single man to contend with made Henry happy, for he saw no insurmountable barrier in obtaining the girl's liberty.

"Be of good cheer," he said, in a hopeful, cheering voice, "I am going to leave you now, but it will not be for long; and when I return it will be to effect your release."

"Thank you—thank you!" came in tones filled with tears. "Help me to escape and God will reward you."

"What is your name?" asked Henry.

"Bridges," was the reply, quickly followed by these hurriedly spoken words: "Great Gruggers! I hear Mrs. Gruggers coming."

Heard the girl scurry across the floor, throw herself down on the rude bed proffered her, a minute later he heard the door open, and then in a rough voice:

"Well, that's good. But my head gives us much more trouble than it is worth."

As he heard no more, he commenced de-

scending, and had nearly reached the ground when he heard a footstep below him; glancing downward in alarm, it was increased by the sight of a man standing at the foot of the buttress, and gazing up at him.

He paused where he was, realizing the fact that he had fallen into a trap.

He could not escape by going upward, and to descend was to run plump into the arms of the waiting person.

What could he do?

Suddenly letting go his hold, he flung himself away from the wall, intending to fall plumply on the man; but the latter had been closely watching in anticipation of some such movement, and nimbly sprang to one side, thus allowing Henry to strike heavily on the ground; before he could arise the man was upon him.

Desperately did the lad struggle to overcome his antagonist, who, as soon as the fight commenced, was joined by a companion, who as opportunity offered, gave Henry a crack on the head which reduced him to subjection instantly.

With the blood trickling down his face, he was dragged to his feet and forced along to the door of the mill, on which one of his captors loudly knocked.

After a few minutes' wait, from the inside Gruggers asked:

"Who's there?"

While one fellow clapped his hands over Henry's ears, the other answered so satisfactorily that the door was opened forthwith.

Henry was forced inside by his captors, one of whom immediately opened wrathfully on Gruggers.

"Do you ever keep watch, you careless fool?" was demanded, in angry tones of the low-browed villain.

"In course I does," was the reply.

"Of course!" in sneering tones. "Still, you didn't know this fellow was just crawling up the side of the mill."

"Was he?" said Gruggers, blankly.

"Yes, he was, and you stretched out in bed snoozing away at a two-forty gait. A pretty fellow you are to trust," and this was said in a most disgusted tone.

Henry had stood hard by, held in the clutches of the second person, who had been staring at him very hard.

"Here, Gruggers," he said, "just hold this fellow; I want to speak to cap."

At these words Henry glanced up at him, then dropping his eyes, he sought to recollect when and where he had seen these features.

Gruggers having taken hold of him the two men crossed the room, and after talking earnestly and low several minutes, they advanced toward Henry, the one saying:

"Well, Joe, I'll trust you to take him safely to the work shop. Start at once, and don't let him get away from you."

"Never fear," replied Joe. "I'll see to it that he don't get away. Come now, youngster," addressing Henry; "but first let's see if he's got any teeth around him."

A search revealed Henry's brace of revolvers, which Joe slipped into his own pockets with numerous grunts of satisfaction.

"You're all right now! Come along, and mind you don't open that pertater trap of yours unless you want to get in trouble, for I warn you I'm a tall man."

CHAPTER IV.

THE LITTLE IRISHMAN.

WHEN the counterfeiters reached their rendezvous the afternoon was well-nigh spent.

Entering the house they found Jerry stretched

out on several chairs, with Mag sitting by his side, alternately bathing his head and helping herself to the contents of a huge black bottle which she nearly always kept within reach.

Haley immediately took it upon himself to attend to Jerry's wounds, none of which were at all serious.

Mag's fall resulted in no harm other than a good jarring up, although that was more than those whom she had swept down the cellar stairs before her, and fallen upon could say in their own behalf.

The drunken hag, when relieved of her charge, proceeded to prepare supper for the men, which, by the time it was ready, found night at hand.

Not having had any sleep during the day, as well as having been on the tramp so long, found them all too tired to think of work, and by general consent it was decided that they should all go to bed.

The next morning after breakfast Haley drew out his pocket-book for some purpose and began fumbling with and arranging a quantity of papers; in doing this his eye chanced to fall upon one which gave him a slight start, and after examining it closely, he said, in a low but gratified tone:

"That's excellent! It's queer I forgot it but it's a fact that Joe's time is out to-day. I wonder if he will know enough to come right here?"

Joe Decker, the person referred to, had been a valuable member of the gang, having been uniformly successful as a shover of the "queer," until one fine day he was caught "dead to rights," and "railroaded" to the "white house up the river" (Sing Sing) for a term of years.

His time was to expire on that very day, and knowing his worth, Haley felt a little anxious to know whether he could count on his once more "falling to" his "pals."

Accomplishing the purpose for which he had drawn out his pocket-book, Haley returned it to his pocket, arose, walked to the trap-door, descended the cellar stairs and entered the work-room.

New lamps had been put in the brackets in place of those broken by Ferret's well-aimed shots; and at the time of Haley's entrance, Dugan, Dempsey and the others were steadily working in their various departments.

At a table sat Dugan, and right at his elbow lay a pile of sheets of twenty-dollar bank bills newly run off the press and waiting only for the counterfeit signatures of the president and the cashier of the bank they were counterfeited on, before they would be placed in circulation; on a sheet of white paper, Dugan was rapidly writing the president's name, and at each new trial seemed to grow more like the original.

"Well, how goes it?" asked Haley.

"All right," replied Dugan, showing the original signature and his imitation of it. "Don't you think I have got it down fine?"

"You have so," said Haley, in a pleased and gratified tone. "The man couldn't swear he didn't write it himself. Going right to work on the bills?"

"Yes."

"That's good! When we get several more editions of the plate and a couple off of the other two they're finishing, we'll close up the shanty for a while and go off on a picnic."

"That's the talk," said Dugan, as Haley moved away.

Haley himself knew but little, in a practical way, of engraving, although he was an excellent critic of such work, which in part accounted for their having continued their nefarious work so long without any great check; so he was content to work the press that printed the money, and

on the red seals from a separate

For several days they were all busy as bees, preparing an avalanche of counterfeits to throw on the market.

It was on the third night after Ferret's fight and escape, that at about eleven o'clock a rap came at the door.

Jerry, by this time fully recovered, went to the door, opened it, and inquired who the individual was, and what he wanted.

"Paper is king," was the low-spoken reply, which caused Jerry to start with surprise, for the words struck an old chord in his memory, bringing back recollections of years before, when that sentence had been the password to a branch office in New York City, which they had been compelled to quit through fear of detection.

"If you know how to use it," said Jerry, giving the old reply to the countersign.

"And I do," said the new-comer.

Perfectly satisfied, Jerry made way for the person, who stepped at once into the room, after which Jerry closed the door, turned up the light, and took a good look at the new-comer.

"Joe Decker!" he suddenly blurted out.

"The same," was the smiling reply. "Is Haley any where around?"

"Yes; I'll call him."

When Joe and Haley met, the latter extended the former a most cordial welcome, and all hands quitting work they spent a jolly night in drinking to the remembrance of old times, and toasts of better luck to him in the future.

"So you're Decker's nephew?" said Joe.

"Yes."

"And heir to all he left?"

"Yes."

"No you're not!" and Decker spoke in the most positive manner.

"Why?" asked Haley, in alarm; "do you know—"

"Yes; I know all about it," interrupted Decker. "There's another heir—"

"That I have got safely locked up, and intend to keep so, if——"

"If I don't give you away."

"Exactly."

"Can I see him?" asked Decker.

"Him?" said Haley, in surprise. "It's a *her*."

"No 'tain't," and Joe spoke grumly. "It's *him*!"

"You're mistaken!"

"I'm not."

"But you must be!"

"And you are mistaken!"

The result of this dispute was a laying together of heads, and Haley was an astounded man after hearing Joe's story of the heir who could come between him and the estate which he had risked so much to get—*the person of which he had—but let us not anticipate.*

Under cover of darkness they paid the old mill a visit, arriving just in time to catch Henry as he was descending after his interview with Lucy Bridges, and who afterwards started under charge of Joe for the counterfeiter's rendezvous.

"Henry Beebe, of Fordham," Ferret repeated, after the strange woman who had nursed and cared for him.

"Yes."

"He's dead!"

"Dead! Thank God! Pray do not consider me inhuman because I am thankful that a human being is dead, for I have suffered deeply."

"I can understand," said Ferret, soothingly.

"And if you will leave here and go into the world once more I will be your friend. I am

strong and well, and must leave here to-day or to-morrow. Will you go with me?"

"It's not worth while," was her sad answer.

"I am not fit for the world's society."

"Nonsense! Say that you will go."

After much urging she consented to do so, and in the still, small hours of the night they crawled from the thicket, made their way through the woods to an out-of-the-way station, where only milk-trains stopped for the cans of lacteal fluid brought there by the surrounding farmers.

By good fortune they managed to catch a late train, and about daylight they found themselves in New York.

They took the cars down town, and getting off at Twenty-second street, Ferret led the way to a house about midway in the block, where a married sister lived. At first, his sister was averse to taking the woman in the house, but accepting Ferret's explanation, she gave Ann Purcell a cordial welcome, and made her quite at home.

Ferret slept until eleven o'clock, then went to the office of Dodge, Mead & Co., where he learned of Henry's visit, and drew some money.

Going up-town again, he stopped at his sister's.

He only remained a few minutes; but, just before leaving, he said to Anna Purcell—for so the woman had given her name:

"When I come back I want you to tell me all you know about the past life of Squire Beebe."

"I'll tell you all I know," was the reply.

"And the history of your own life, as well?"

"I will do so."

Having barely time enough to catch the train, Ferret hurried away, and, not very long after, he left the train at Fordham, and made his way to the hotel. Paying for his room the few days he was indebted for it, he paid in addition several weeks in advance.

Some half hour or more later, as the clerk of the hotel was standing in the main hall, he saw coming down the stairs a little Irishman with fiery red hair, and eyes of a queer, brownish-red hue; he was dressed in the roughest style, his dress consisting of a pair of heavy boots; corduroy pants kept up by a dirty strap around the waist; a checked shirt of some rough material; a dilapidated coat just about strong enough to hang together; on his head he wore a soft felt hat, whose color at first had been light, but which now had a most dingy look, and in the band was stuck a short black dhudeen and a small package of tobacco; as his lips parted they disclosed dingy yellow teeth, between two of which a hole had been worn as if from the habit of frequently holding a pipe there.

Brushing past the astonished clerk he strode up the road at a rapid gait.

"Be jabers," he muttered, "but I'm the broth of a boy," and commenced singing softly:

"I'm a bold, good Irishman,

Jolly as ever you did see,

I live, boys, happy as I can,

In 'Merica—land of the free."

It was growing dark by the time he reached the outskirts of the village, where, when safe from scrutiny, he pulled out a brace of revolvers, and examining them, put them in a handy place.

For some hours he trudged slowly, his mind evidently occupied in thought, which, however, was broken by the crack of a pistol and a loud cry.

"In for it already!" burst from the Irishman's lips. "Well, he goes," and off he started on a run, to meet, perhaps, some other wild adventure.

CHAPTER V.

HENRY IN CAPTIVITY.

"Who can he be? What have I seen in the forest?"

These were the queries that agitated Henry's mind, as, leaving the old man behind, he wandered quietly along by Joe Decker's side.

In vain he racked his memory in the endeavor to recall the time when and the place where he had before seen the man who was guarding him and conveying him to some place—where or for what purpose the lad could not conjecture.

At last the first faint glimmering of a recognition began to dawn on him, but unable to clearly define the fact, he abruptly asked:

"Who are you?"

"Why, don't you know me?" was Decker's reply, in a surprised tone of voice, either genuine or assumed for the occasion.

"No."

"Are you sure? Ha—ha—ha! Forgot me, eh? That's rich!" and again he laughed a most disagreeable, grating, hoarse laugh.

If anything were needing at that moment to establish his identity in Henry's mind, that self-same laugh would have done it; he had heard that laugh in bygone years, heard it often—and well remembered the fear of cruelty which it used to inspire, for more than once his wails of pain had kept it and the lash in Joe Decker's hand company as regular as the pendulum of a clock.

Instinctively, Henry hung back a little, at which the heavy hand on his shoulder tightened its grip, while once more that hoarse laugh broke from the man's lips.

"Ha—ha—ha! Know me now, do you?"

"Yes," was the slightly defiant answer; "and what of it?"

"Nothing, particularly, only you will know that I'm a bad man to fool with, as you learned years ago, when you tried to overcome and override me by exhibiting your cursed spunky temper."

"I'll admit your badness," said Henry, in a cool, self-possessed tone and manner, "for you are rotten in wickedness to your heart's core, a fit companion for the devil himself."

"Now, that's good," said Decker, with grim sarcasm raging in every word. "But I'm shocked though to hear you speak that way of your kind and loving father."

"Father! You my father? No! A kind Heaven surely would never permit you to perpetuate such accursed qualities as you possess. My father! No, thank Heaven, you are not, and when you say so you lie!"

At this insult the blood rushed to Decker's face, and he raised his hand as if to strike the lad he claimed as his son, but thinking better of the matter, he merely said:

"Well, perhaps you know best; but don't you bear my name!"

"To my sorrow, I do."

"And haven't I always taken care of you?"

"Taken care of me!" said Henry, surprised at the villain's cool, implied assertion. "No, never! As a mere lad you had me with a kind, kind-hearted woman, Mrs. Conroy, telling me that I was your child. For ten years you were not with me, then you came, you said to have the man when you learned that she had kept me possessed of some money, she said it was a reward what you said, married me, and then you told me with all her money. You then married her to strengthen my best. She said, nothing longer able to work, that I supported her, and told work faster. I could do no longer, and she went to the parish. This, you told me, is the history of your care for me. I prayed God that I might never meet you, but He has willed it otherwise, and I am content. You, my father! If I believed it, I would drain every drop of blood from my veins to

myself of living to bear so black, so accursed a

"Um!" grunted Decker. "The idea don't seem to please you. But don't get excited over the, it won't help you any."

One reason why Henry had not immediately recognized Decker was because the whiskers he had been accustomed to wear, no longer were on his face, and in addition his hair was cut short, in accordance with two prison regulations, one of which prohibits a convict from wearing long hair, and the other demands that his face be kept smooth and free from beard of any description.

These differences now struck Henry forcibly, and in his indignant state of mind his words rung with bitter scorn as he said:

"Excited? Would not anyone get excited to be claimed as a descendant of a convict with the smell of the prison-pen still clinging about him?"

Angered now, Decker cried, savagely:

"Be careful what you say or I'll spill for you the blood you seem so anxious to get rid of."

Worked up as he was, Decker unconsciously relaxed his grip on Henry's shoulder, a fact which did not escape the observation of the sharp-witted lad, whose mind had not remained unoccupied by thoughts of escape.

They were then passing through a light growth of woods, from which they were separated on either side by only a fence; once inside of the woods, Henry thought he could escape, so seizing the opportunity he broke away from Decker's relaxed grasp and darted rapidly toward the fence.

"You dog!" cried the astonished and chagrined man. "Stop there or I'll give you a lead pill."

It needed more than mere words, however, to intimidate Henry, who by this time had reached the barrier which had separated him from the wood.

Decker saw what the lad's aim was, and knew that once in the depths of the woods the chances of recapturing him would be very small; determined to kill him rather than let him escape, the hardened villain whipped out a revolver, and just as Henry, with hands placed on the top rail, was about to vault over the fence, he fired.

The bullet whizzed by the lad's head without doing him any harm, its only effect being to hurry his movements.

Hending slightly he took an upward and forward spring, intending to clear the obstruction, but fate was against him, and one toe catching the top rail it flung him forcibly to the ground on the opposite side.

Cursing at every leap, Decker bounded after him, and clearing the fence with a flying leap, he landed on the other side just as Henry, bewildered by the shock of his heavy fall, was arising to his feet.

Just then came the sound of rapidly falling feet, as of some one hurrying to the scene.

"D— it!" cried Decker. "There comes help."

At the same time, inspired by thoughts of help near at hand, Henry uttered a loud, shrill cry.

"Keep your jaws together, you devil's whelp," growled Decker, savagely. "I'll fix you," and drawing back his fist he struck the lad a blow that felled him to the ground; as Henry was arising again Decker clutched him by the throat and

threw himself down by his side, muttering: "Keep quiet until we see who this is."

By the footsteps advanced until they had arrived nearly opposite.

Up to this point Henry had remained perfectly

quiet, and the strangling grasp had been slackened a little; he opened his lips to scream out, but found that it was impossible, but like the drowning man clutching at a straw, he spent the breath in giving vent to a deep groan.

"Curse you," said Decker, under his breath, and then tightened his grasp on Henry's throat until the breath scarcely came and went, and relentlessly kept the suffocating lad in this condition, while with his own breath bated, the villain crouched silently in the shadow of the woods and fence, and listened to the movements of the newcomer, who evidently had heard the groan, as he had at once stopped short in the middle of the road.

Ferret, for he it was, standing there, panting and nearly winded, with a cocked revolver in either hand, listened intently for some further sounds of conflict.

But none reached his ear, and it left him in a deep quandary.

"Was it a groan I heard?" he thought. "And if it was, from where did it come? From this side of the road, I think."

Looking nervously about him, for he knew not how suddenly he might be attacked from an unexpected quarter, he approached the fence across which Decker and Henry had gone; he stepped cautiously forward, and reaching the fence he peered into the edge of the woods.

Decker stilled his own breath, and squeezed out of Henry's body the little left, or so nearly that animation was suspended.

Nothing but the stirring of the tree tops in the gentle breeze, and the occasional cry of a whippoorwill, or the fluttering of a bat's wings as it passed, broke the silence of the night.

Mystified and puzzled by his inability to discover aught of the causes leading to the pistol shot, Ferret stood stock still, holding fast to the top rail of the fence, unaware of the fact that within ten feet of him, in a nearly dying condition, and in the power of a merciless villain, his young and tried friend was lying.

"Hang the luck!" he muttered. "Mystery, mystery, all has been mystery since I began working up this case. Some one has been shot and killed, but where is the body? and where has the murderer gone to so quickly? I'll hurry on and see if I can find the bottom of this affair."

Stepping out into the road he walked rapidly along in the opposite direction to that which Decker and Henry had been pursuing, which took him toward the mill, the objective point which Ferret had in view when leaving Fordham, in the character of a red-headed son of the Emerald Isle.

When Ferret's footsteps had died away in the distance, Decker arose with a grunt of satisfaction, picked up the form of the unconscious lad, got it over the fence, and started on again.

Reaching a stream of water which crossed the road, Decker soused him in bodily, the result being Henry's return to sensibility.

His captor then forced him rapidly along, and just as day was beginning to give warning of its approach they reached the rendezvous of the gang.

A few words explained the matter to Jerry, who led the way to the cellar and to the side opposite the entrance to the work-room; here he swung back a heavy door, disclosing an interior whose stygian darkness refused to be penetrated more than a few feet by the rays of the light shed by the lamp which Jerry carried; and into this black and loathsome hole Henry was roughly thrown; he heard the door shut and bolted; he was a prisoner in a deary, loathsome dungeon—for what? He did not know—he did not dream the reason.

CHAPTER VI.

LUCY BRIDGES.

WHEN in obedience to Haley's orders, Joe Decker started to return to the rendezvous, the head villain went as far as the door of the mill, and there remained until the two figures were swallowed up in the darkness.

Then re-entering the room he closed the door, and addressed himself to Gruggers.

"I'm blowed if I ain't afraid to trust you any longer. How many more besides that boy, do you suppose, have climbed up to the girl's window?"

"Not h'another one, I'm sure, unless h'it was that drunken Dutchman what you picked h'up h'outside," replied Gruggers, hanging his head in guilty fear.

"Could you swear to it?" sternly asked Haley.

For a minute Gruggers seemed disposed to evade the question, and then he gave reluctant answer.

"No—not h'exactly, you know."

"Of course not," said Haley, ironically.

"Here I've been risking my liberty to keep you shady, under the condition that you were to keep a sharp watch over the girl; any more carelessness on your part, and I'll be tempted to let you shift for yourself."

At this covert threat, Gruggers winced and turned pale; the truth of the matter was that Gruggers had long been "wanted" by the officers of the law, and detectives had been on his track for a long while, and had it not been for the intervention of Haley, and through him of Dechaz, the grizzled ruffian would before that time have been undergoing punishment for a most hideous crime, the details of which it is unnecessary to state here.

Plucking up a little courage, he answered:

"Well, it can't be 'elped now."

"No, that's clear. I want to see the girl."

"Come this way," and Gruggers, after picking up a hand-lamp, led the way up-stairs, and reaching the door of the room in which Lucy was confined, he untied the fastenings, after which Haley entered, bearing the lamp, while the rascally Gruggers departed for the regions above, there to wait until called by his master in crime.

After Mrs. Gruggers had gone up-stairs, under the supposition that Lucy was sleeping, the girl arose from the bed and paced the floor excitedly, her hands clenched tightly together as if to stifle the tumult of hope that filled her breast; her face was illumined by a smile, the first that had been there for days, weeks, even months.

"Thank God," she murmured. "Some one has found me out at last. If he only keeps his promise! If he does—if he does! Kind Father in heaven grant me strength to bear it a little longer, until I can escape from the clutches of that cruel, wicked man!"

So great was the poor girl's agitation that every fiber of her body trembled, and twitched, and throbbed.

Engrossed with her hopes and fears, she hardly heard the noise of the unfastening of the door, and guessed not its cause until Haley stepped across the threshold into the room.

The villain caught sight of her just in time to see the last waning look of happiness, ere her features assumed a look of deep disgust, not unmingled with fear.

"My pet looks happy as a bird," said Haley, in mock-tender tones. "What has occasioned it? Thoughts of our approaching wedding, perhaps?"

Her thin lips curled in scorn.

"Of course you have made up your mind to marry me," suggested Haley.

"Marry you? Never!"

Are you so much in love with your present quarters that you don't like to leave them?" and he glanced about the apartment, which, in truth, was anything but inviting or comfortable looking; it once had been used as a room for bagging meal, and from the ceiling above a square spout extended down to within a few feet of the floor; the floor was white with the dust of grain, and every cranny and projection which offered a lodging-place was thickly covered; the bedstead was a rude, tumble-down affair, and the bedding was filthy in appearance, besides which the total furniture consisted of a single chair, a wash-bowl and a broken piece of looking-glass.

Following Haley's glance, she for the thousandth time took in her surroundings, and then said:

"Far better to live here in this hole, than in splendor with you."

"But now, Lucy," said Haley, urgingly, "see here. Be sensible. You must marry me."

"I will not."

"But you must. I have gone too far to back out, and—"

"Stay, Bernard Haley," interrupted Lucy. "It is not me you wish to marry, but the money between which and you I stand. When Uncle Henry dies you and I become his heirs, and—why do you smile?" she paused to ask the question, to which Haley gave no reply, the smile having been caused by the girl's ignorance that even now her uncle was resting in his grave. "But never mind," said Lucy, seeing that no answer would be given, "it is the money you want. I care not for it. Bring me here paper, pen and ink, and I'll release every claim in your behalf. Will you do it?" and any but a heart of stone could scarcely have resisted the heart-touching pleading of that voice.

"No," he said, pointedly and gruffly. "And have you go in a court of law, and swear that you were intimidated. Not much."

"But," she pleaded, "I'll give you my sacred word of honor never to utter a word against you."

"Bah! I care not that for your word of honor," and he snapped his fingers contemptuously. "You must be ready to marry me one week from tonight. Now you understand what I expect of you; so now, although I hate to leave your charming presence, you must permit me to say good-by," and cowering low, he left the room, closing and fastening the door behind him.

"Can it be," groaned the fair young girl, "can it be that a just Heaven will permit such an outrage! No—no, it cannot be; something will surely happen to prevent the consummation of so foul a wrong, even now an unknown friend is waiting for me. But here he comes again," she exclaimed, as she heard busy fingers at the fastenings.

Sticking his head within the door, Haley said:

"Pardon my intrusion, sweetness, but I forgot to tell you that I made an important capture a short time ago."

"A capture?"

"Yes; of a young fellow who had most likely been playing, only modernized, Romeo to your Juliet. I had him taken care of, and you may meet him in spirit, in *flesh* you never will. Good-night, darling!" the closing words were uttered in a soft and tender tone, strongly in contrast to the harsh breathing ones by which it had been preceded; withdrawing his head, he fastened the door again, and then she heard his footsteps slowly die away in the distance.

Closing both hands across her forehead tightly, she staggered across the room in the darkness, until, reaching the side of the bed, she sank down on it, wailing out the words:

"Lost—lost! My God, all hope is gone, and I am to be made a living sacrifice!"

Then silence followed; a dull, heavy silence, well-fitting companion to the dreary darkness and gloom that enveloped her prison pen; the quietness was not broken, not even by a sob or a moan from Lucy, for exhausted nature had given way under the cruel blow conveyed to her hopes by Haley's words, and she had fainted.

Haley meantime had called Gruggers, and after many warning commands, he left the mill, and started down the road in the opposite direction to that in which lay the counterfeiters' home.

After ten minutes brisk walk, he halted suddenly, paused a minute or two in thought, then faced about and plodded back over the course he had just come.

Passing by the mill, he merely glanced up at it, and walked briskly onward until his feet struck the bridge; then he paused and looked once more in the direction of the mill, on which his gaze had barely been fastened when he started and uttered an abrupt exclamation.

This was caused by seeing, either in reality or imagination, the figure of a man vanishing around the corner of the mill.

For several minutes he gazed intently at the spot, and then, after satisfying himself that the darkness might have tricked his eyes, he muttered:

"Pshaw!" 'twas only my imagination; I'm getting to be as nervous as an old woman, thanks to the German forger, Becker, and the little man in black—curse him! I'll put away these foolish fears," and he strode briskly onward, unaware of the fact that his eyes had not deceived him, unaware also that the dreaded "little man in black," in another guise, was the reality of the shadow, which he had faintly seen through the darkness, as it whisked around the corner of the mill.

Straight to the spot where he had been the recipient of an ugly fall, the detective went; no streak of light, however faint, was there to meet his eyes, but bent on learning something, he once again essayed the task of climbing the wall; reaching the window, he found everything within dark and silent; he tapped gently on the wooden shutter, but received no response.

Trying one of the shutters, he found it loose, and drawing it open, he waited and listened, but hearing no sound to alarm him, he raised the shutter fully and dropped into the room, only to find it deserted.

Closing the shutter, he struck a match, and by its swiftly dying light found that the room was deserted. With cautious tread he examined the apartment thoroughly, and from the machinery in it conjectured, and truthfully, that here the process of bolting, or the separation of the bran and chaff from newly ground grain, had been carried on.

By the time that he had done this, daylight was not far distant, and being determined on a complete exploration of the mill, he concluded to pass the day in it, rather than risk gaining entrance again; so he laid himself down in a secluded corner, screened by machinery, and with his weapons placed handy he sank to sleep.

It was long after daylight when Lucy's consciousness returned, bringing with it its attendant neutral horrors of what had, and what might happen.

Almost without realizing it she slipped from the bed, arose, and sank back groaning out:

"If I could only die—if I could only die!"

It was the despairing, heart-broken wail of a human being in the greatest depth of misery.

She arose again and tottered toward the window; her foot struck something.

"It's my hat," she muttered, and picking up the offending article, she gave it an angry toss to the opposite side of the room. "I will never use it again," she thought, bitterly.

In picking it up her hand had encountered something else; a knife which had been used to cut strings for the mouths of the bags that were filled at the square spout, and eagerly she clutched the weapon.

Happy words greeted the finding, and with despair ringing in every word, she exclaimed, holding up the knife and gazing at it earnestly:

"If all else goes against me, at least this is left."

Underlying these words was a terrible significance.

CHAPTER VII.

HENRY'S STRIKE FOR LIBERTY.

For what purpose, or in furtherance of what ends he had been cast into the black hole he occupied, Henry could not determine.

Of one thing he was sure, that he was in a tight box from which escape was next to impossible; still he did not lose heart altogether, and starting at one side of the room, he made a circuit of the entire wall, which, by its feeling, he knew was of boards.

In fact, in the construction of the place a square hole had been dug out and a wooden frame, covered with boards, had been erected inside so as to prevent the earth from caving in.

Had he been above ground with but such a frail barrier before him, he would have been at liberty in a very few minutes.

"I must get out of this," muttered Henry; "if I don't, what may become of Lucy! Lord only knows! Get out I must somehow; I must run out, scratch out, dig out, something. Let me think."

Sitting down in the middle of the floor, he drew up his knees and rested his head thoughtfully on them for a while, and then, without having intended it, he drifted off to sleep.

How long he slept he had no means of telling; his waking was caused by the entrance of Jerry, who brought in some food, or rather put it down just inside of the door, and then departed.

Henry was exceedingly hungry, and soon dispatched the food brought him.

Then his mind turned once more to his situation, and he began to lay plans for escaping.

"If I could only dig a tunnel," he mused; "if I had a shovel I could do it. But why won't these fingers answer?"

Going to the side of the dungeon furthest from the house, he commenced closely examining the boards composing the wall.

Some of them, from contact with the moist earth, had begun to rot, and, to his great joy, Henry found the bottom end of one rotted until it was soft as cheese, and could easily be broken.

He broke out a piece about four feet in length, and soon afterward the earth behind the spot where it had been tumbled into the room.

According to Henry's calculations, he was not more than twelve or fourteen feet below the surface, and he hoped by steady work to reach the outside world in three hours, or a little more.

With his dinner a case knife had been brought; using this for a pick for loosening the dirt, he shoveled it down and into the black hole with his hands.

At first his progress was rapid, and in less than half an hour from the time he started he had totally disappeared within the tunnel; now came the hard part of his task, for he was getting too far away to throw the dirt he dug loose into the dungeon, and consequently was obliged to handle it twice.

Working bravely at his work, he slowly but surely reached the surface.

He became satisfied that not over two feet of earth separated him from liberty and the smiles of the upper world.

He halted in his work, undecided what to do. Was it night or day?

If it was daylight, would he stand any chance of escaping?

Bending his head, he listened intently, but no sound broke the silence except the chirping of a cricket.

What should he do?

Puzzled by the question, it was decided for him by Jerry's entering the dungeon below with food and drink.

Raising the lamp he held in his hand, he allowed its rays to penetrate the place, but seeing nothing of his prisoner, Jerry stepped inside and advanced until he stood in the center of the tunnel.

Then seeing nothing of the captive, Jerry grew alarmed, and gave one sweeping glance around him; his eyes caught sight of the dirt heap, and to it he jumped; he saw the tunnel and tried to look up it, but recent droppings of dirt had nearly choked up the entrance, and all that he could see or hear was little clods of earth that Henry was removing and dropping with all possible speed, for he had become aware of the presence of Jerry and knew that his absence had been discovered.

"It is now or never," muttered Henry, as he frantically dug tooth and nail in the soft earth; "there's only a couple of feet further to go, and then—"

Leaving the sentence unfinished, he fell to his work with more desperate energy.

At first Jerry cursed like a pirate, and began removing the dirt in the lower part of the tunnel in hopes of being able to reach up and pull Henry down.

It only took several minutes' time to show him the uselessness of such work, and he quitted it.

Snatching up a lamp, he bolted into the cellar, dashed recklessly up stairs, slammed the lamp on the table, cried to Haley:

"The boy's a-gettin' 'way," and rushed out of the house.

"That?" cried Haley, springing to his feet and ringing Jerry closely.

Waiting for breath, for his rapid work had left him, Henry dug his toes in the earth on either side of him, folded his arms above his head and then straightened up his form; the earth between him and the outer world, pressed under the pressure, cracked in numberless places, and then went sliding down the tunnel, leaving Henry's head above the surface of the ground and his eyes turned toward the just setting sun.

"There he is!"

It was Jerry's gruff voice—once heard, never forgotten.

When a bound the lad's feet were on the ground, he was prepared to make a run for liberty, but a pair of strong hands grasped hold of his arms tightly; in vain he strove to shake off his captors; there was no getting around the fact, he was once more a prisoner.

"Well, I'll be shot," gasped Haley. "If that's the case, I don't know what ever was. Take him down stairs again and put him in the other cell."

Henry was forced down the stairs and confined in another dungeon similar to the first, into which Haley had gone to make an examination.

Knowing how the thing had been accomplished, and fearing that the walls would all cave in if Henry's present condition, he had some planks

brought from another part of the house, and had the men nail a new sheathing all around the interior.

Fearing for the safety of his plucky prisoner in the other room, he sent Jerry in to bring him to that which was newly boarded.

"Come out of here," growled Jerry, opening the door of Henry's cell.

"What do you want?" wearily asked the lad.

"Come out lively, or you'll find out in a way not much to your likin'."

The threat implied did not bother Henry much, still he deemed it best to comply with his demands, or seemingly so, and at once stepped forward to the door.

"You're going back to your old quarters," gruffly explained Jerry.

"All right," said Henry, quickly taking a sweeping glance about him, during which, gaining sight of the stairs, his eyes scintillated with eagerness.

Suddenly raising his hand he dashed to the floor the lamp that Jerry held, leaving the place in darkness.

With an alarmed cry Jerry made a grab at him, but Henry, ducking under his arm, started for the stairs with long, flying jumps.

"Curse you!" yelled Jerry, irately, and swearing terribly, he sprang after the flying lad, who, having reached the stairs, was rapidly mounting them.

The trap-door had been closed, and the loss of time it occasioned Henry was the cause of his capture, for a single second less of delay and he would have been safely on the floor above, and in the now gathered darkness he might have broken away and made good his escape.

The delay at the trap-door gave Jerry time to come up with him, and seizing Henry by the heel, the brute dragged him roughly down the stairs.

Matters were explained to the others who had rushed out to see what the trouble was, and then, with a punch and a kick, Jerry forced Henry along in the direction of the dungeon which he had first occupied.

"There, see if you'll dig your way out again," were Jerry's sarcastic words, as he gave the lad a heavy push that sent him headlong to the floor.

Once more Henry heard the door locked and bolted, and again he was alone in gloom and darkness—alone, with time in plenty to grieve over his inability to perform the promise he had made to Lucy Bridges, at the thought of whom a sigh escaped him.

Meanwhile Haley, Jerry, Joe Decker, and the others had left the cellar to go to the floor above for a drink before going to work.

The liquor had been poured, and each man held his glass prepared to drink, when a sharp, quick rap came at the door.

Jerry opened the door, when in bounded Dechaz, panting for breath, knees trembling, and face pale.

"You here?" and Haley's face paled; "what's the matter?"

In a thick, husky voice, Dechaz brokenly gasped out:

"The de-tect-ives are on—," making a longer pause than usual, as if his breath had been used up.

"Are on what? Julius Caesar?" and his face became ashen-hued, "Have we been discovered?"

CHAPTER VIII.

FERRET ONE MINUTE TOO LATE.

"SPEAK—speak, man!" cried Haley, sharply.

"Are we discovered?"

Dechaz returned a breathless, unintelligible reply, which, however, to the ears of the fright-

ened Haley seemed an answer in the affirmative, and he exclaimed:

"Then, boys, we must jump the place at once. Pack up all the money we've got ready, and then bounce yourselves as quick as possible."

"Hold up!" said Dechaz, holding up his hand, as a command to halt; "you misunderstand me."

"Then our retreat here has not been scented out?"

"No, nor is there much chance of its being found out," replied Dechaz, his wind slowly returning.

Haley breathed a deep sigh of relief, and then exclaimed:

"But you have some news. What is it?"

"The detectives are on the track of Gruggers, and before morning he will be in custody unless he receives warning. That is what brought me here. I dared not telegraph you, so came myself."

At mention of the fact that detectives would soon be at the old mill, Haley's face was filled again with an apprehensive look.

He drew out his watch—it was nine o'clock.

"What time will they get to the mill?" he sharply asked.

"Between this time and morning," was the reply Dechaz gave.

Haley thought of the girl confined there, and groaned aloud.

Were she to be liberated, were she to escape from his custody, he knew that his career of villainy would be cut short; coward as he really was, he trembled at the thought of going to the mill, and possibly coming into contact with the officers of the law, yet the situation was desperate, and only desperate remedies could avail.

"I'll risk it," he muttered; then, aloud:

"Jerry!"

"Well?"

"Saddle two horses as soon as you can."

"All right," was Jerry's reply, swiftly departing on his errand.

"Will you go with me, Dechaz?"

"No, the risk for me is too great."

"Will you go, Decker?"

"Yes," was the ruffian's ready reply.

"So be it, then. Are you all ready?"

"Yes."

"Got revolvers and knife?"

"Yes."

In a very few minutes Jerry had the horses ready, and springing into their saddles the two men galloped away in the darkness.

Ordinarily Haley would not permit the use of horses in going to and from their rendezvous, as the noise made in galloping along the road, if done as frequently as the counterfeiters went to and fro, would naturally have caused curiosity in the minds of those who occupied the few farm-houses along the road, and ultimately might be the means of leading to their detection; it was for the same reason that they were all so cautious in the use of fire-arms; and indeed, had it not been for these very precautions, their presence in the old tumble-down house must long ago have been discovered; as it was, though farmers almost daily passed within a few hundred feet of the house, never a single one dreamed of the character of those whom its roof sheltered.

"Hurry up your horses, Joe," said Haley; "we've not a minute to spare."

"All right."

And Joe plunged his heavy heels into the flanks of the horse he was riding.

Knowing every foot of the ground, they dashed along the road at a rapid pace, rapidly nearing the old mill, where at the time the brave girl was stretched on the rickety bed, with the knife

clasped in her hand, and the point resting against her bared breast.

"Will not this be the easiest way?" she murmured. "But no. I'll not do it until driven to it, and God forgive me for cherishing such wicked thoughts."

She dropped the knife by her side and gave way to her bitter reflections, during which she placed her hand on her bosom to assure herself of the safety of something she had placed there; that something was a linen collar covered with writing.

In the moment of her deepest despair she had found the knife and had determined to use it on herself rather than to become the wife of Bernard Haley.

"Oh!" she had moaned, "if I could only get paper and pen and ink, to expose his rascality!" struck by a sudden thought she halted short, put up her hands, and unpinning her collar, she muttered:

"This will do for paper. And pens?"

With nervous, springy steps she paced the floor to and fro, until finally her foot struck against the hat which she had flung into the corner at the time of finding the knife.

That chance kicking against the offending article was a revelation in itself, and bending down, she picked it up with a glad cry, and tore from it a long plume.

By the aid of the knife, she soon had a passable quill pen.

Two of her wants were supplied, but how about the third?

"Where can I get something that will answer for ink?" she mused.

After a few minutes of silence, she exclaimed:

"I'll do it. 'Tis fitting that the history of his dastardly actions should be written in blood!"

Coolly—calmly, she bared her fair white arm nearly to the shoulder, midway between which and her elbow she plunged the point of the knife.

Crouching on the floor, beneath the window where the single ray of light fell across her, she held the collar against her knee, dipped the quill in the flowing blood, tearing afresh the wound as the red fluid became too thick to flow freely from her pen; this was what she wrote:

"For the love of God and humanity, the finder of this will make public these, my dying words, and help to bring to punishment the dastard who drives me to destruction.

"My name is Lucy Bridges; my mother was a sister of Henry Beebe, of Fordham, who also had another sister, who married a man named Haley. The result of this union was the birth of a boy, Bernard Haley, who grew up to become a desperado and a villain. My mother died, leaving me destitute, and I was employed as a governess in a respectable family, when my cousin curses on the relationship came to me and pretended to love me. I hated him from the first, and saw that he wished at Uncle Henry's death to come into sole possession of his wealth. Finding me obdurate he kidnapped me three months ago, and has kept me locked up in an old mill, located in Westchester County, though I do not know where. My keepers are vile tools of his, and call themselves Mr. and Mrs. Gruggers.

"A week hence, Haley says he will force me to marry him, though why I cannot conceive, unless Uncle Henry has died; but I shall never marry him—never! The knife that punctured my flesh to get for ink the blood that flows from this pen, is by my side, and rather than marry him I shall slash the blade's entire length in my body, and a just God will forgive the desperate act. Whoever you may be that finds this—pray—pray—see justice done toward a miserable girl, and God will reward you."

Assured of the safety of the precious composi-

tion, she returned it to her bosom and buttoned up her dress, after which she lay silent and motionless, until she heard a heavy thumping at the door; she heard Gruggers as he hurried down stairs past her door, and then silence followed for a few minutes, after which came the sound of numerous feet hurriedly tramping up the stairs.

At her door they stopped, and several minutes later, lamp in hand, Haley entered the room; her face showed the surprise she felt at seeing him, and drawing herself up, she asked:

"What seek you here?"

"I want you," he said, gruffly. "You must leave here at once. Come, put on your hat and shawl!"

"Where are you going to take me?" she inquired, in an alarmed tone.

"That is none of your business. Come, lively now; do as I say!"

Knowing how vain resistance would be, she picked up her hat and shawl, and slowly donned them, after which she permitted herself to be led down stairs and helped into the saddle.

"You take her, Decker, I'll follow on foot," said Haley. "And mind you, man, kill her before you let her get away."

"Trust me for that," was the reply.

"Ay," was Lucy's bitter, mental comment as she heard the tones of that rough, brutal voice, "you can safely be trusted to murder anybody—be it man, woman, or child."

"Come on," said Decker, and taking hold of the bridle of Lucy's horse, he started on a return to the rendezvous.

The reason for this sudden move had not yet been given to the wondering Gruggers, and Haley now gave the explanation, which caused the grizzled ruffian's face to blanch with fear, and in despair, he gasped:

"What am I and the old woman to do?"

"I don't know," was Haley's cool reply, he not wishing them at the workshop for various reasons. "Taking a trip across country, would be best!"

Nearly wild with fright and terror Gruggers bounded up stairs.

"Come—come!" he gasped, as he confronted his wife, in their room, she having just finishing dressing.

"What's the matter?"

"The officers are coming!"

It needed no other words to spur her on, and with hasty steps they began descending the stairs; when opposite the room where lately Lucy had been confined they were rendered almost crazy with fear by a loud struggling, scraping noise; in their anxiety to get away Gruggers fell headlong down the whole flight, while Mrs. Gruggers fared quite as badly; Haley was already gone, so bounding out of doors they took to their heels.

The scraping noise they heard occurred in this wise. Ferret had slept on undisturbed, waking up some time after nightfall; rising to his feet he took off his shoes, and carrying them in his hand he stepped into a long, hall-like passage; along this he cautiously went, pausing now and then to listen for some sound that would lead him to where the girl was confined.

His explorations had occupied a long while, and he was beginning to despair when he heard a jumble of voices beneath him, among which was one he thought to be the girl's; he did not stir until all was quiet; then striking a match he discovered the mouth of the spout leading to the room below: thinking that the others had gone: leaving the girl alone, he stepped into the spout, and slid down it, just as the Gruggers passed, when his feet touched the floor the upper portion of his body was still in the spout, but by getting

down on his knees he freed himself; once more he struck a match, and by its light took in its surroundings, saw that the room was empty, and though he knew by the disordered condition of the bed that it had lately been occupied.

"She was here!" he exclaimed, in chagrined tones, "I arrived just one minute too late."

CHAPTER IX.

LUCY'S VISITOR.

HALEY would not have entrusted the safe-keeping of Lucy to Decker, except for the fact that he feared meeting the officers of the law within the time before they would have passed the cross-road to Fordham, from which direction, in all probability, the detectives would come.

But he need have had no fear of Decker's being untrue to his trust in any way.

Decker also knew that he could not consider himself safe until the cross-road had been passed: consequently, when they reached the main road, after leaving the mill, he started both horses at a good round gait.

The road was passed safely, and then he moderated their speed, keeping along at a quiet jog.

Lucy, meanwhile, maintained silence, realizing her inability to better her position; nevertheless her mind was busy, and just as they were passing an isolated farmhouse, she drew out the linen collar, and dropped it in the road, unseen by her sharp-eyed conductor.

"God grant it may fall in friendly hands."

This was the fervent prayer that filled Lucy's heart, as she let fall the white collar, covered with characters written in her own pure blood.

To Decker she said not a word, and he spoke not, except to give some warning against making any outcry as they passed the few farmhouses scattered along the road.

In this way they proceeded, until, finally, Decker drew rein in front of the long, low house, whose sides, and rafters, and beams, could they have spoken, would have told many a horrible tale.

Jumping from the saddle, he offered to help Lucy down, but scorning his proffered assistance, she dismounted herself.

Jerry was at hand to take the horses away, so Decker, clutching Lucy's arm tightly, half-dragged her toward the house, on entering which they were met by Mag, whose late deep potations had swelled up face and figure until they seemed ready to burst. The light of the lamp made her red face look still redder, and, to Lucy's eyes, it half-appeared as if her skin covered a brightly burning fire.

"Drunk again?" growled Decker.

"Yesh—drunk (hic) 'gain; but whatch-zhat-to-you?" and she leered at him in a most revolting manner.

"Mag, can you light me down stairs?"

"Yesh; but (hic) whosh her?" jerking her thumb at Lucy.

"One of Haley's pets. But, come, show me the way to the black-hole."

"Yesh—yesh (hic); zish way."

The hag picked up a hand-lamp, and staggered along to the trap-door, which she raised and then commenced descending the stairs.

"Am I to go down there?" asked Lucy, her voice filled with alarm.

"Yes."

"I won't go!" she said, resolutely.

"Yes, you will!" snapped Decker; and picking her up bodily, he placed her feet on the steps, and then, standing behind, pressed so heavily on her shoulders that gradually but surely she was forced to descend, until she stood on the outer floor.

Mag had waited at the foot of the stairs for

em to get down, and then, rolling wildly about she walked, she stepped toward the door of the unoccupied dungeon, muttering:

"Zish way—(hic)—zish way."

The poor girl was wild with terror, as, the door being swung back, she gained a view of the black interior.

Turning quickly to Decker, she clasped her hands, and cried, appealingly:

"Pity me—pity me! Spare me!"

"Stop your noise and get in there!" he gruffly replied, seizing her by the shoulder and giving her a shake.

"Oh, don't put me in that horrid place, for God's sake, don't!" she wailed.

For answer he caught her about the waist, lifted her from the floor, stepped inside the dungeon, dropped her in a heap, and then with a hoarse laugh, went outside and left her in a darkness and gloom that could not but appal her young soul; moaning in anguish, she fell backward on the cold, damp floor of earth, and there lay, a prey to the most bitter grief.

Had she known that even then a friend was near at hand, she might not have felt so badly; and although she did not know it, such was the case.

Lying in his own dark prison pen, Henry had heard the noise incident by bringing Lucy down stairs, had heard portions of the conversation preceding the locking of the door.

One voice, sweet and melodious even in distress, he recognized as that of the captive of the old mill, and instead of feeling sorry at her presence, it caused him to feel happy; why this was so he could not then have told, although it was because of a certain sense of nearness to something that was to him an object of deep interest.

From having been in both dungeons, he knew that they were separated by only a few feet of earth, and although he could see no way then to do it, he determined to dig through to her presence.

Hastening to the side adjoining the other black hole, he dug down by the face of the board for over two feet, at which distance, much to his joy, he found that it terminated.

Digging two feet deeper, he threw the soft sandy earth behind him, and slowly forged a tunnel toward the goal he was striving to reach.

Meanwhile, Lucy had been paid a visit by Decker and Mag, who had brought with them a bedstead which they placed against the wall, as good fortune had it, just at a spot opposite that where Henry had commenced excavating.

"Now you can go to bed," said Decker. "We won't bother you again, and—now I'll be generous and leave you this lamp."

This was a real kindness, and Lucy accepted it gratefully, and when they had gone flung herself down on the bed, too tired, too despairing to undress.

While lying thus she was aroused by a noise beneath her, and with fears once more thoroughly excited, she sprang from the bed and cried out:

"Who is it?"

"Silence!" came the warning sound. "A friend," was added, in low tones.

Henry had calculated the distance between the two dungeons exactly, and after crawling under the wall of that which held Lucy, he took an upward turn, and a few minutes later his head was seen more above ground.

In raising up, he struck against the bed, thus alarming the young girl.

"Who are you?" again queried Lucy.

"He who promised to help you," was the reply Henry made, as he crawled from beneath the bed. "And you are Lucy?" he said, as

glancing into the girl's face, intense looks of admiration began to light up his own.

"Yes," she answered. "Were you made a prisoner that night?"

"Yes, and occupy a place similar to this a few feet away. Poor girl!" he said, compassionately, noticing the worn and tired look she bore, and sidling up to her, he stole his arm around her waist.

"Sir!" said Lucy, backing away. "Is this the way you show your friendship?"

"Excuse me," said Henry, humbly; "I did not mean to offend you, but—"

"But what?" and Lucy's tone softened.

"I love you," blurted out the lad.

At this frank declaration the girl smiled in an amused way, and then replied:

"But you have not known me two minutes."

"Yes, I have," interrupted Henry. "I've known you ever since I heard your sweet voice when I climbed up to your window. I loved you then, and I love you now."

"But you are only a boy."

"A boy!" and he drew himself up haughtily.

"I am over twenty, and so much of a man that you did not scorn my proffered assistance," and his tone had an injured ring.

"Excuse me," said Lucy, it being now her turn to apologize. "I accept you as a friend. I can say no more now."

Lucy was just eighteen, that period in a girl's life in which a manly, daring action draws out her worship for the performer of the deed. Some such feeling actuated her then, for though she would not commit herself in so many words, she did not completely refuse the advances he made.

In response to his queries, she gave him an outline of her life, and the cause of the machinations against her.

She had barely finished the recital, when a loud cry of alarm rang through the cellar, followed by the hurried tramp of feet descending the stairs, this being succeeded by high and angry words, among which Henry distinguished:

"Gone? Impossible! How could he get out?"

His absence had been discovered.

At the sound of fingers busy at Lucy's door, he darted under the bed and crawled into the tunnel through which he had come. Haley and Decker entered the girl's room together, and both looked relieved at sight of her.

"She's all right," said Haley. "Now how in thunder did he escape?"

"I don't know," said Decker, clearly puzzled by the strange circumstance, "unless he mined his way out again."

They returned to the other dungeon, but no trace of any such operation could they find, owing to a singular circumstance.

The pile of earth from the first excavation had not been removed, and lay within fifteen or twenty inches of the spot where Henry had commenced the second, in doing which, he threw the earth on the first pile, until it had assumed quite a height. When in the passage, he had only conveyed the dirt behind him, and the pile falling from some reason, filled up the hole he made, leaving the heap of dirt very much like the original, so little changed in appearance as to be unnoticed.

They were nonplussed to account for the manner of the lad's escape, and once more returned to Lucy's quarters, and began searching around aimlessly.

As Haley bent and looked under the bed her heart quaked with fear; but he arose without having discovered anything.

The perspiration stood out on Haley's brow like beads. They were not caused so much by heat as by fear, for he knew that if really at

liberty, Henry would soon make things howl about his ears.

"Decker," he said, abruptly.

"Well?"

"You must go to New York right away."

"What for?"

"For Ben Cartwright," said Haley. "See him, and get him to come up this afternoon. Go at once."

"All right," replied Decker, starting out and up the cellar stairs, and thence in the direction of the station. It was a good long walk, but by hurrying he managed to catch the early train, and by nine o'clock he was in the city. He took the Fourth avenue car down town, standing on the front platform. As they were passing Twenty-second street, he chanced to notice a woman just turning into it. Peering closely at her for a few seconds, he started, then jumped from the car, muttering:

"Anna Purcell living? Can it be her? Or is it a ghost? No, she has changed, but it is her."

He followed her down the street, without her seeing him, until she had opened the door; then she caught sight of him, and with a wild scream she fell prone across the threshold.

CHAPTER X.

FERRET ON THE TRAIL.

FINDING the room was empty Ferret hurried down stairs, but by that time Gruggers and his wicked life-partner were out of sound and hearing. Picking up the lighted lamp from where it had been left, the detective made a quick but thorough examination of every apartment in the old mill, only to find each and every one bare and deserted.

Why they had thus precipitately fled he could not conjecture, unless they were in danger of being captured, which, as the reader knows, was the true cause.

Satisfied with his exploration, Ferret blew out the light, and was about to cross the threshold outdoors, when he heard the stern command:

"Halt!"

"What do you want?" he coolly asked, placing his hands on the projecting butts of his ready revolvers.

"You are our prisoner," was the answer.

"Show up," said Ferret. "Who are you?"

"Officers. Here, Tom, take hold of him."

"One moment, gentlemen, if you please, Who is in charge?"

"I am."

"Your name?"

"Bob Barron."

"I've heard of you as a shrewd fellow and an honest man. Will you strike a match?"

Amazed at the coolness of a supposed rogue, Barron nevertheless complied with the request, and while the little shaft of wood was burning brightly, Ferret stepped up to him and displayed a shield, which flashed and scintillated in the light.

"Will you respect that?" Ferret asked.

Barron recognized the badge at once, and drawing back, he replied in a half reverential tone:

"Yes."

"That's good," said Ferret, "and now let me tell you one thing. You've come too late; your birds have flown."

"Hang the luck," growled Barron. "How long ago? do you know?"

"Yes; about half an hour or so, although I could not prevent their flight, and in fact knew not the reason of their decamping so suddenly till now, which also seems queer, as it implies that they must have received information of your intended visit."

"It's queer," said Barron, "but this is the

second time that precious pair have slipped through my fingers. Somebody in the office is playing false, and I'll swear to it!" and his tone left no doubt in Ferret's mind that he was convinced of the truth of what he said.

"And now, gentlemen," said Ferret, "expressing hopes that you may have better luck next time, I must bid you good by."

After shaking hands with his new acquaintance, Ferret struck into the road, and trudged along toward the place where his last visit had been fraught with so much danger.

By this time the night was well spent, and a greyish haze was beginning to hang like a mantle along the horizon.

Each passing minute saw it grow lighter, and soon small objects became visible.

"What's best to be done?" he thought. "Shall I send to the city for help and make a descent on the place? But how ridiculous that would make me appear, if they have been frightened out before this? No, I'll beard the lion in his den, find out if they still are there, and get the lay of the land. Then—I'll swoop down on 'em like a hawk, and gobble 'em all up before they can say Jack Robinson."

Pursuing this train of thought, Ferret kept his eyes fastened on the ground, although he scarcely noticed what he saw. He saw the message written in blood, and, in an abstract manner, kicked it along, then a second and a third time, before anything in its appearance struck him as singular; then he recognized it as a lady's collar, and thoughtfully picking it up, gazed absently at the characters on it till Haley met his eyes; then he was aroused to activity—to life.

Finding the place where the message began, he read it through, then read it once more.

"Great God! but he must be a devil incarnate!" exclaimed Ferret. This was written yesterday, I think. He'll force you to marry him in a week, will he! Not much, if Ferret is alive and kicking, or knows anything—and he thinks he does."

He halted for a short time in thought, and then proceeded on the course he had been pursuing, muttering to himself:

"Yes, Lucy, I understand. He kept you in the mill until he heard that officers were coming to search it; then he came for you and hurried you away, and you are at this moment confined in their den."

How near the truth he came, how well he reasoned, the reader can judge.

A near-by policeman hearing the scream emitted by Anna Purcell, hurried across the street, and Decker, satisfied of the unhealthiness of the neighborhood in case she came to while he was around, took time by the forelock and made away from the spot at a rapid gait.

"Phew!" he whistled; "Haley's in danger on all sides. She living! I thought her dead long ago, for I have never seen her since the time when she so suddenly disappeared. What's to be done! At least Haley must be warned, for she knows of the boy's existence, and with her living he'll never be safe."

But his present errand was to see Ben Cartwright; he found the object of his search in a low dive in Chatham street; Cartwright was a tall, thin personage, with hatchet features, which told at a glance his love for strong drink; forming a queer contrast with his unprincipled, besotted face, was the suit of ministerial black he wore.

His tale could be told in a few words.

An eloquent and promising young man, he had been ordained to preach; a little wine now and then had led to deeper potations, and gradually he had drifted away until the minister was

merged in the drunken sot; this was the man Decker wanted.

He soon explained to Cartwright what was wanted of him, and at the promise of munificent pay, his bleared eyes sparkled with anticipation, and he pronounced himself ready and willing to go.

At five o'clock that afternoon they reached the place where the sacrifice was to be made, and both received a cordial welcome from Haley.

Decker drew his master in evil to one side, and in a few rapidly uttered words, gave him an outline of the new feature in the complication.

"So," said Decker, "if you marry the girl, you may miss fire after all. Will you go on?"

"Yes," said Haley, adding a savage oath, for he was beginning to see that his position was something like taking a jump in the dark; you know where you jump from, but not where you will land. "I'll marry her now, if it is only to tame her proud spirit. Come, Cartwright!"

"Yes, sir," replied the sleek villain, rubbing his hands together.

"Are you yet a regularly ordained minister?"

"I am."

"And a ceremony performed by you will be binding?"

"It will."

"Have you a blank certificate?"

"I have."

"That's all. Come on!"

Haley led the way into the house, and through the trap door to the cellar, calling on Mag to follow with lamps.

Opening the door of Lucy's cell, the little procession filed in, she watching its advent with open-eyed amazement.

In a few minutes all in the house were gathered around, waiting and listening.

"Now," said Haley, taking Lucy by the hand. "Now go on."

Cartwright coughed and began reading the marriage service; instantly Lucy comprehended all, and snatching away her hand, she cried:

"Away, foul-hearted wretch!"

"Be sensible, Lucy," said Haley, sternly. "You must marry me!"

"Marry you?" she cried, retreating rapidly. "Never; I'll die first!" and drawing the knife from her bosom, she raised it on high.

This was an unexpected thing, but Haley was devil enough to get over it, signing to Decker to approach from behind and disarm her, while he kept her attention chained.

The plan succeeded admirably, and Decker wrested the weapon from the hand of the wild, despairing girl, who, in her misery, sank prone upon the floor.

But Decker dragged her to her feet, and standing behind kept her erect, while Mag, so drunk that she could hardly keep her feet, stood near by, prepared to force Lucy to make the assenting motion with her head when it became necessary.

"Go on," said Haley, gruffly. "You will not be interrupted again."

Cartwright resumed the service, every word of which fell on Lucy's brain with the force of a sledge hammer.

"Will you take this woman to be your wife?" was asked.

"I will," replied Haley.

"Will you take this man to be your husband?"

"No!" shrieked the terrified girl; at the same instant Mag's heavy hand caused Lucy's head to bend forward.

"She bowed. Is that sufficient?" asked Haley.

"It is," answered Cartwright.

"No—no!" screamed Lucy. "It is not—it is not! Save me, Henry, save me!"

"I will!" came the short, resolute reply, and, like a flash, with eyes blazing, Henry confronted

Haley, and by a well-directed blow, sent him sprawling on the earthen floor.

CHAPTER XI.

LUCY A WIFE.

HENRY'S sudden appearance in response to Lucy's cry:

"Save me—save me!" carried consternation to more than one heart in the party, for they knew not how many more might follow from the same unknown source.

The shock of the blow and the fall bewildered Haley for a minute or two, then beginning to understand the matter, he began to fume with rage.

"Take care of that fellow!" he cried, pointing at Henry. "Decker, Dugan, somebody!"

"Decker and Dugan at once advanced to take hold of the lad, who, with clenched fists, standing by Lucy's side, cried:

"Back—keep back, you base-born curs; lay not a finger on either this girl or myself!"

As he spoke, fire flashed from his eyes, showing that the lion within him had been aroused.

Dugan hesitated, but Decker was not so easily daunted, and laughing hoarsely, he said:

"Come on, man! Do you mean to back down before a boy, without shooting-irons or toad-stickers?"

The sarcasm of the words spurred Dugan up, and together they stepped forward, and at a word from Decker both threw themselves on the brave youth.

Well and nobly did Henry fight, nor did he give in until, overcome by sheer force, he was lying flat on his back, with his throat clutched in Decker's grasp, his hands held by Dugan and his feet by Jerry.

"Get some ropes," ordered Haley.

These were speedily brought.

"Bind him securely," was the next order, which was promptly obeyed.

"Now," said Haley, "let's see how he got here so suddenly."

A close search soon brought to light the place of Henry's concealment, although even after its discovery Haley failed to understand why no traces had been left at the place where he had commenced excavating in the other dungeon.

"So," he said, with a short, dry laugh, "after playing Romeo and Juliet, you come down to a more modern mode of courting. I suppose," addressing Henry, "you have been keeping my charming cousin company ever since leaving your own comfortable quarters?"

"I have," was Henry's reply.

"And have been making love to her in the most approved style, no doubt?"

"There is one thing," said Lucy, tartly; "his love would be a credit, while that of others is the blackest dishonor."

"Meaning me, of course," said Haley, sarcastically. "Well my lovely, half-married wife, I'll forgive this little freak, but don't let it happen in the future, for I warn you I'm of a very jealous nature."

"Brute!" was the only reply vouchsafed by the indignant girl.

"Tut-tut, my dear. Now, Cartwright, suppose you proceed with the ceremony," and once again he clutched, and firmly held Lucy's hand.

Cartwright had, so to speak, kept a blank eye on all the proceedings, and fixing his eyes on the book he went on with the service from the place where he had been interrupted.

"For God's sake!" cried Lucy, looking appealingly toward Cartwright; "don't marry me to this wretch—this hideous man!"

"Courage, Lucy!" said Henry, "the marriage won't stand law. You were forced into it, and I'm a witness to the fact!"

ely around, and facing every word carrying with it

You may be a witness, but you will never testify to what you have seen!"

It was impossible to misunderstand the dark threat, and Henry involuntarily shuddered as he reflected how fully he was in Haley's power, and that he was not a man to shrink from any deed, no matter how foul or bloody its character.

Driving the matter from his mind, Henry intently listened to the words that fell from the renegade minister's lips.

A ring was forced on Lucy's finger at the proper time, and several minutes afterward Cartwright said:

"I now pronounce you man and wife, and what God hath joined together let no man put asunder."

"God's work!" cried Henry, bitterly. "Bet me say that of yon devil," pointing at Haley as spoke.

The counterfeiter flushed up with anger, but saying it, said to Decker:

"If that monkey says another insulting word I'll slap a gag in his mouth."

"With pleasure," was the reply.

"Now, then, friends all," said Haley, coolly, "allow me to introduce my wife. I propose that we adjourn to the floor above, and drink her future health and happiness."

"You bet I'll do that," muttered Mag, "two or three times if they want to. Come along, my dear," and taking Lucy by the arm, she led her into the cellar, then up the stairs, and into the room above.

Here liquor and glasses were brought out filled up, and drank to the future well-being of Mrs. Haley, two words which cut the girl's very heart.

Very frequently was this toast repeated, until inside of an hour there were but few heads in that party that in feeling were not light enough to float away in the air.

During the day, Haley had caused to be fitted up a room on that floor, in which he intended keeping and keeping his unwilling bride; the windows had been secured by stout wooden bars across them, and the lock placed on the handle of the door, so as to render tampering with it from the inside an impossibility.

Four after the orgie commenced, Lucy was allowed to go to her new quarters, into which she was locked.

Her mind was a chaos of conflicting emotions; of the man who now claimed her as a wife, and the fear that the youth who had attempted to marry her would be brutally murdered, pre-occupying.

"Would to God I had died before this," she murmured. "His wife! Cruel—cruel fate!"

Knowing what she did, she flung herself upon the bed, which occupied a position near the window, and lay there thinking—thinking, until her brain whirled, until her head seemed at the point of splitting.

"What was that?" she suddenly exclaimed, springing to a sitting posture.

The lamp they had left in the room was burning brightly, and she glanced quickly here and there for a solution of the noise which had so startled her.

After being repeated in some minutes, she sank back upon her pillow, but had scarcely been barely touched it, when again came a sound similar to that which she had before heard, apparently came from the direction of the head of the bed; resting her elbow upon her pillow, and her head in her hand she fixed her gaze upon a spot between the bars; waiting each second seemed an age, but she held her

breath and waited; a minute passed, and then she saw faintly outlined the face of a man.

Her first impulse was to scream, but this she cut short, for she remembered that she was among foes, and that another could scarcely come from outside; so she waited, watched, and listened.

She saw the man as he scrutinized every portion of the room possible for his position, until his gaze fell upon the bed upon which she was lying; steadily he gazed at the bed and herself for several minutes, and then she saw him raise one hand and beckon.

She slid silently from the bed and approached close to the window, which he motioned her to raise.

The whole affair was so strange that it impressed her with a feeling of fear; still a sort of fascination impelled her to do the silent bidding of the stranger, and taking hold of the sash she raised it several inches and asked:

"Who are you?"

"Sh!" came the warning sound. "Speak very low. Are you Lucy?"

So startled was she by the unexpected question, that for a moment she could frame no reply; then she said:

"I am. How do you know me? Did you find me?"

"I did," was the reply given before her question was fully asked; "and I will yet prevent that villain from consummating his dastardly purpose."

For the nonce her wifehood had been forgotten, but this allusion brought back the memory with force and strength, and in a half-whisper, she said:

"Too late—too late!"

"How too late?"

"I am already his wife."

"Great God, is that true? When were you married?"

"Scarce two hours ago."

"Curse the luck! Ferret has once more arrived a minute and more too late."

"Ferret!" cried Lucy, having caught the name. "Are you Ferret, the little detective?"

"I am."

"Thank God! Then I am safe."

In rapidly spoken, low-toned words, she informed him how she had learned of him through Henry, at whose captivity the detective was greatly surprised, for at first he could see no possible reason why Haley or any of his gang could wish to detain him as a prisoner; but afterwards a flood of light broke in upon his mind, and he thought:

"I've picked up another thread in this mysterious case, or I am a fool!" and the latter he certainly did not consider himself.

"Can you not help me to escape from here?" Lucy eagerly asked.

"Not to-night; but keep up a brave heart, and before long—"

"Sh!" warned Lucy. "Some one's at my door. Go—go!"

Ferret took the warning and faded from view in the darkness beyond.

CHAPTER XII

MAG'S HORRIBLE DEATH.

AFTER Lucy had gone to her room, Haley and Decker descended to the cellar, and satisfying themselves that Henry was too securely bound to get loose they locked him in the dungeon which Lucy had occupied, after which they returned to the floor above, to continue their bout at drinking.

At the table from which they usually ate, those of the gang who still were able to sit up were sitting, filling up their glasses again and

again, and tossing each one off with as much apparent zest as if it had been the first.

Among those who most frequently replenished glasses was Mag, and yet she seemed no worse off than before she sat down.

To her liquor was but water, and she drank far more freely of the former than the majority of people do of the latter article.

"No more, Mag," said Jerry, his voice too thick to distinctly articulate; "you've had enough."

"No I—hic—ain't," she replied. "I knowsch—hic—when I getsh 'nough—hic."

"Let the old gal alone, Jerry," said Haley. "We don't have weddings here every day, do we, Mag?"

"No—hic—wish you—hic—did," and down her rum-seared throat another glass of whiskey disappeared.

"Ha-ha-ha!" laughed Haley. "I don't doubt it! Enjoying yourself, Mag?"

"Yesh—hic—zish's—hic—the glorious—hic—time I sh—hic—ever had."

"Glad of it," said Haley. "Here's the bottle, Mag, help yourself."

Clutching the bottle in her rum-palsied hand, she gazed lovingly at it, and muttered:

"Help—myself—hic—so I—hic—will," and putting the bottle to her lips, it was with ecstatic joy that she allowed its contents to gurgle down her throat.

In less than fifteen minutes she had drained the bottle, and bending over toward Haley, she said:

"Gi' me—hic—shmore."

Used to the smell of liquor, accustomed to drink more or less of it every day, Haley was staggered by the alcohol-laden fumes of Mag's breath which reached his nostrils when she spoke.

"Did you smell her breath, Decker?" he queried.

"Yes."

"I really believe it would take fire if a match was put to it."

"I believe it too," said Decker.

"Gi' me—hic—shmore," reiterated the rum-soaked hag.

"No—no, you've had enough," said Haley.

"No hain't," she growled. "Gi'—hic—me—shmore—hic—or I'll—hic—raish the—hic—devilsh."

There was a drunken, dangerous glare in Mag's eyes as she spoke, a glare not altogether to suit Haley's taste, for he knew that when aroused she was a perfect devil; so, muttering aloud:

"Well, let her drink herself to death and hell if she wants to," he passed her another bottle of liquor, which was not long in joining its predecessor.

Finishing the bottle Mag nodded and nodded as if about to fall into a drunken sleep, but suddenly arousing herself, she glanced around the room, resting her gaze vacantly on Haley for several minutes, then arose to her feet and reeled toward Lucy's door.

Haley watched her movements with some alarm, and seeing her about to open the door was about to interrupt her, when Decker said:

"Don't interfere, Haley, so long as she don't get crazy or do any damage. She won't harm the girl, only frighten her a bit."

Acting on Decker's advice, Haley refrained from opposing Mag's wishes, and silently watched her unlock the door.

Lucy had thrown herself upon the bed in a position from which she could see a person at the moment they entered, and it was with a jumping, throbbing heart that she kept her gaze fastened on the door.

"If it should be Haley?"

Oh, the agony of the thought!

She heard the bolt shoved back, then the knob was turned, the door opened, and Mag unsteadily stepped into the room.

Lucy gave a sigh of relief, although the sight of her visitor caused her soul to recoil with horror, for nothing is so repulsive to a pure-minded woman as to see one of her sex a slave to the demon—rum.

Holding fast to the door Mag rolled her eyes around the room in search of its inmate, but those bloodshot orbs were too greatly blinded to see anything.

"Where are—hic—you?" she asked, but Lucy maintained silence.

"Wantsh to escapsh, don't you?" she grumbled. "But—hic—you can't. Waitsh till I—hic—turnsh up—hic—the light."

Partially closing the door she reeled toward the stand on which stood the dimly burning lamp, and extended her trembling hand to take hold of it.

Lucy shuddered to think of the possible result of meddling with a kerosene lamp by a person in her condition, and with horrified eyes she watched every movement.

Mag's hand clutched the lamp, and she attempted to turn the light up, but failed each time.

"Wherish it?" she muttered, and bent her head down the better to see the little thumb-screw for which she was searching. So close did she advance her head to the lamp that her hair began to burn; but she was too far gone to notice it, and Lucy's cry of warning fell unheeded on her dulled hearing.

At the same moment she found the thumb-screw and gave it several turns, the flame shot from the top of the glass chimney, in a great, broad stream.

Lucy was about to advise turning it down, when her attention was chained by another stream of fire, of a bluish or purplish shade, which shot out horizontally—and from Mag's mouth!

"Her breath is on fire!" gasped the frightened girl, slipping from the bed just as the bloated woman fell heavily to the floor, with the pale blue flame issuing from mouth, nostrils and ears. For a single second her eyes remained fixed on the terrible spectacle, and then, horrified beyond measure, she uttered shriek after shriek in rapid succession.

"Something's wrong!" cried Haley, springing to his feet. "Come, Decker!" and he bounded toward the place of the fearful scene.

When the two hardened wretches stepped inside the door and saw the unfortunate Mag stretched on the floor literally burning to death, they fell back appalled.

Not yet dead, Mag uttered groan after groan, her trembling in their agony.

Transfixed with horror, neither Haley nor Decker was able to lift a finger to help the wretched woman.

Great drops of perspiration gathered on her forehead and oozed from every pore of her body.

The blue flame grew darker in color, and a dying wail, intense and despairing, told that the consuming fire had reached her vitals.

The sweat started down her face in muddy streams, and so deeply was it burned with alcohol that it took fire, and the flames went crawling all over her features, giving them a fearful warlike and ghastly look. Her clothing, wet with perspiration, was caught by the burning flames, and in a few seconds might well be seen but a mass of bone, ghastly free.

Up to this point Lucy had retained her senses, and then even she lost the sight, reason and soul, and fell back on the bed, pale and inanimate.

Sickened at heart, Haley and Decker turned their heads away, and under their breath uttered exclamations that told how horror-stricken the frightful scene had rendered them; but even with heads turned, they were greeted by sight of the reflection of the ghastly light and each one covered his eyes.

But even then they were conscious of the dreadful thing, for their heated imaginations kept picturing it afresh.

At the end of ten minutes Haley opened his eyes and cast a look at the floor.

There still was the mass of flame, but burning less fiercely and lighter in color.

Shuddering he closed his eyes again, nor opened them for ten minutes more.

Then he looked once more, and a sigh of relief escaped him, for except a flickering tongue of flame which occasionally arose and fell, all was over.

Decker had sunk to the floor, and resting his forehead on his knees, with his arms had shut out the dreadful scene.

"Decker!" called Haley, slapping him on the shoulder.

The man looked up at him with eyes that were haggard and wild, while he seemed laboring under a sort of stupefaction.

"Decker, get up," said Haley. "It's all over!"

With eyes bulging, Decker turned his head and took a fleeting glance at the spot where he had seen the drunken woman wreathed in fire; partially reassured, he allowed Haley to help him to his feet, though when there he trembled and shook as if with the ague, and but for Haley's assistance he would have fallen.

The daring, brawny, murder-loving desperado was as a child.

"Haley," he said, hoarsely, and clasping his shoulder he turned him around until he faced the charred corpse; then raising his hand, Decker pointed one finger at the mortal remains of Mag, and uttered one word; it was:

"Rum!"

It was a tragic scene!

"Never will I again touch a drop of the accursed stuff. Not as long as I live—which won't be long!" he added, gloomily.

Haley, because of his better education, was not so much affected by the sight as Decker had been, although he was a coward at heart, so he now became the counselor instead of advised, and said:

"Come, man, don't let this cast you down; you're all right."

"I'm not," asserted Decker. "That is a warning of my own end."

"Pshaw!" said Haley, contemptuously, never dreaming the unknown truth the words contained.

A deep, long-drawn sigh now drew their attention to the bed, but ere they could reach it Lucy was conscious; instinctively her eyes sought the dreadful spot, and gasping convulsively with terror, she withdrew them after a transitory glance.

"Take me out of here!" she cried. "Take me anywhere—anywhere, so that I leave this dreadful place."

"Come on," said Haley.

With averted face, Lucy bounded after him, followed him gladly and willingly down stairs to the cellar, and without a murmur submitted to being locked up in the black hole.

"Lucy," said a voice, by the time the door had fairly closed, Haley having been so mentally wrought up as to have forgotten that Henry occupied her former quarters.

"Henry?" cried the girl. "Is it you?"

"Yes."

"Thank God!" she murmured, and staggered

toward him through the darkness; they met, and clasping her arms about him, the poor girl swooned once again.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE POISONED FOOD.

AFTER locking Lucy in the dungeon, Haley returned up stairs, and going to the room in which the charred and crisp remains were lying, he removed the lamp, and closed and locked the door.

Arousing Jerry from his drunken stupor, he tried to make him comprehend what had happened, but finding this impossible he gave up in disgust, and allowed the newly-made widower to sink again into his alcoholic dreams.

His attention was next drawn to Decker, who had his head lying in his arms, which rested on the table before him.

"Come—come, Decker, rouse up!" said Haley, in a rallying tone.

"It's no use, cap," he sadly replied. "My time's close at hand."

"Nonsense!" said Haley. "Come now, stir yourself and help me get some water to drench these drunken lubbers."

Arising in a mechanical way, Decker followed Haley with spiritless steps, and as directed, soused each of the men with water.

This partially sobered them and they crawled off to bed, all except Jerry, to whom was imparted the story of his wife's tragic death.

His comment was:

"So the old woman's kicked the bucket! And all through rum. I told her so!"

No word of regret—no sign of caring whether dead or living.

Calloused, indeed, was his heart.

Without any further words he reeled away to his bed, and soon was soundly sleeping.

Leaving Decker awake to see that all went right, Haley turned in and slept till daylight, after which the former went to bed; but not to sleep, for his mind was weighed down by fearful forebodings.

By daylight, Haley felt bold enough to enter the room of the tragedy, and did so in company with Dugan and Jerry.

The body was a fearful sight to behold, and neither of the three cared to remain long in the room.

"What was the matter with her?" asked Dugan.

"Spontaneous combustion," replied Haley, who remembered having once read an account of a similar occurrence.

In this he was partially in error, for a spontaneous combustion must, as its name implies, originate of itself; it, however, always comes only when the person dying in this dreadful manner has become so saturated with liquor that certain gases are produced, until reaching a certain degree of strength they ignite spontaneously.

It is doubtful if even more than two or three cases of actual spontaneous combustion have ever occurred, although the cases where persons have died as Mag did and from the same causes are quite numerous.

"What are you going to do?" asked Dugan. "Bury the body?"

"No," said Haley, after a minute's thoughtful silence. "This shall be our plan: You must go to work at once and finish up all the pointed 'stuff' on hand. As soon as that is done, we will leave the place forever, for I think it dangerous to remain here much longer. Then, whoever comes can do the honors to our deceased friend," indicating the room in which Mag lay.

"Very well," said Dugan, "I guess you're about right."

After breakfasting, all the counterfeits went

to the workshop, and knowing the value of time they worked with a will, while Haley started to pay a visit to Lucy, who, soon recovering from her swoon, had untied the bonds that were cruelly cutting into Henry's wrists.

She told him of Ferret's visit, which caused his heart to leap with joy, for he had no doubt that deliverance would soon come, so great was his faith in the little detective.

Considering their position, they passed the time very happily in each other's society.

They were sitting side by side on the edge of the bed when the door opened and Haley entered.

"The devil!" he exclaimed, as his eyes fell on Henry. "I forgot that you were in here."

"Much obliged, all the same," said Henry, coolly.

"Are you?" said Haley. "Decker!"

That individual responded to the call, and at his master's bidding led him to the other dungeon, and left him there after tying his hands, an operation to which the lad quietly submitted, sure that it would not be for long.

Haley offered some advances toward Lucy, but was so bitterly assailed and repulsed, that, cursing roundly and raging in anger, he left the dungeon, a thankful release, indeed, to the girl, from his contaminating presence.

Slowly the long hours dragged by, and monotonous ones they were to Haley, until at four o'clock in the afternoon, when Dechaz appeared again as unexpectedly as when he had hurried to give information of the intended arrest of the Gruggers.

"What's the matter, now?" asked Haley, in tones slightly alarmed.

"Only this," said Dechaz, drily, "that the sooner you quit these quarters the better."

"Why so?" and Haley's voice was filled with genuine fear.

"Because I have reason to believe that you have been found out."

"How did you learn this? Do you know it for a fact?"

"All that I know is, that all yesterday and to-day rumors have been going the rounds of the office that a secret service detective has been on your track for some time back."

"Well?" cried Haley, impatiently.

"And that he is supposed to have tracked you to your lair."

"It must have been that cursed man in black!" cried Haley.

"Not if you made away with him, for Barron saw the very man at the Grugger's place only a few minutes after they left. So you had best 'pan out' as lively as possible."

"So I will!" cried Haley. "I'll leave this very night."

"I have warned you," said Dechaz. "Now I must go."

"Stay until the thing is over," urged Haley.

"No; do you take me for a fool? I'm deep enough in the thing now."

"Very well, then," said Haley, evidently slightly exasperated. "Go!"

"So I shall. Good-day!" and off Dechaz went.

More alarmed than he cared to acknowledge even to himself, Haley hurried to the workshop and bade the men work their best since, they were to leave as soon after dark as possible.

To Decker he explained matters fully.

"Just as I 'spected," was the gloomy answer Decker gave.

"Stop croaking," said Haley, in a half-angry tone, only so because he was also beginning to fear that something adverse was soon to happen.

"What are we to do with the boy?"

"I don't know," was the gruff response. "If he's in your way—kill him."

"A good idea. Will you do it?"

"No."

"For a thousand dollars?"

"No."

"For two?"

"No, d— it, no! Do you understand that?" he fiercely asked.

"What can I do, then?" asked Haley, in chagrined tones.

"Do it yourself!"

"I can't, and nobody else will."

"Go shoot him!" said Decker.

"It makes too much noise."

"Stick a knife in him."

"Oh, that won't do. Can't you tell me a better way?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"Give him something to eat," was the sententious reply.

"Something to eat?" repeated Haley. "What good will that do?"

"None, unless you put *poison* in it."

"I see—I see!" cried Haley.

"No fuss, no trouble, no nothing," said Decker, relapsing again into his preoccupied state of mind.

Acting on the suggestion, Haley hunted around until he found some arsenic, of which he put a large quantity in a dish of food which was to be carried to Henry.

Meanwhile, the little detective had been busy.

After reading Lucy's communication written in blood, he had hurried on towards the counterfeiter's home.

Concealing himself near by, he kept a close watch on the place all day long, and saw Decker when he returned in company with Cartright, who remained until the next day. Ferret, however, at the time, did not dream of the part Cartright afterward enacted. After nightfall he advanced to the house, and had circled around it numbers of times, hearing sounds of the wild orgies within, although seeing nothing until the light appeared in Lucy's new quarters.

His advancing and peering into the window met with the results previously stated.

Knowing that Haley and his gang still occupied the place, simplified matters a great deal, and all that remained was to swoop down on his prey.

When warned to go by Lucy, he withdrew to a spot where he could watch her window, where he remained, unaware of what was happening inside; when the light had gone he approached the window again, but as Lucy was gone, and none but the dead occupied the room, he received no response to his signals.

Just before daylight he started to tramp it to Fordham, but on the way sprained his ankle, and no one passing for some hours, it was nearly two o'clock when he reached his destination; going at once to the telegraph office, he sent the following despatch:

"CHIEF OF POLICE, NEW YORK.

"Send here as quickly as possible, ten of your truest and best men.

"Telegraph to Secret Service Bureau, Washington, for authority.

"FERRET, Secret Service Detective."

This done, he sat down and patiently waited for a reply, his heart beating high the while in anticipation of a capture which would add another feather to his professional cap.

Several hours passed, and receiving no answer of any kind, he began to fume and fret, and when darkness had begun to fall he felt in just the right humor to curse all mankind, and especially chiefs of police.

* * * * *

"Jerry!" called Haley, about nine o'clock that night, when nearly everybody was ready for the intended departure.

"Yes," was Jerry's reply.

"Take this food to the boy down stairs.

"All right," said Jerry, starting away with the food, unwitting of the fact that it was filled with arsenic.

Hungry as a bear, Henry welcomed his appearance gladly, and as soon as his hands were unbound lifted a forkful from the plate; to swallow that mouthful meant *death!*

CHAPTER XIV.

FERRET'S ARRIVAL.

DURING the time that Ferret was waiting for a reply from the chief of police in New York, he kept his sprained ankle uncovered, and bathed it frequently, which reduced the swelling and killed the pain to so great an extent, that he was able by nightfall to use his foot again.

At the time when he felt like gnashing his teeth in rage, the operator said:

"Message for you."

Ferret snatched the message from the telegrapher's hand, and read:

"FERRET, Secret Service Detective:

"All right! Authority good! Men on the way.

"———, Chief of Police, N. Y."

The intelligence made the detective a happy man, and away to the railroad he hurried, only stopping on the way at a livery stable to hire a team and a large box-wagon, which was to be ready at a minute's notice.

He was obliged to wait at the depot some little time before the train came in, but he brooked the delay with the best grace possible, although his spirits chafed to be on the road to the rendezvous of the counterfeiters.

The train came thundering along at last, and closely watching, Ferret saw a group of men, counting ten in number, and among the faces he recognized one—that of Barron, whom he had met at the old mill.

"Special officers—from New York?" asked Ferret.

"Yes," said Barron. "Ah, you are——"

"Yes. I'm Ferret, the secret service man. Now, boys, come on, and don't give yourselves away any more than you can help."

He conducted them to the livery stable, where they all tumbled into the huge box-wagon, and Ferret taking the reins, they left the village at a pace which might have been jolting as well as rattling, for the springless wagon shook them all up considerably.

On the way, Ferret explained fully the mission they were on, and gave a rapid outline of what was expected of each man.

He halted the wagon about an eighth of a mile from the house, and jumping to the ground, they all silently followed his lead.

Finally they came in sight of the house, and Ferret noticed as a singular circumstance, that the lights gleamed unrestrictedly from nearly every window.

Anxious to know the reason of this seeming carelessness, he stole up to a window and obtained a surreptitious view of the interior.

"Ah!" he cried, understanding the meaning of what he saw. "They were about to fly from the place. This time Ferret has not arrived too late!"

Going back to his men, he distributed them around the house so as to guard the windows, keeping a reserve of three to approach the front door with himself.

When all was in readiness, the four men marched boldly up, and Ferret, seizing the knob, turned it; but the door was locked, so Ferret pounded loudly on it.

It was this pounding that saved Henry's life.

With the mouthful of food midway between

his lips and the plate, he heard the pounding, and guessed its meaning, hunger no longer oppressed, and dropping fork, dish and food to the floor, he sprang to his feet and cried:

"Hurrah—hurrah! Deliverance has come."

At sound of the stentorian, authoritative knockings, Jerry had grown pale and bent his head to hear what followed.

Henry noticed his preoccupation, and determined to take advantage of it. With a single bound he was by Jerry's side, and the next instant the ruffian staggered and fell beneath Henry's sledge-hammer blow.

The butt of a revolver protruded from Jerry's pocket, and being observed by Henry, he snatched it forth, and flourishing it wildly above his head, he dashed into the cellar, up the stairs and into the midst of the excited counterfeiters.

Again came a resounding knock at the door, to which no reply was given.

"Open!" cried a voice outside.

"What shall we do?" gasped Haley, whose face was white with fear, and whose teeth were chattering.

"Let 'em get in themselves," said Decker, in an ugly tone of voice.

Bounding past them, Henry started for the door with the intention of opening it.

For the first time he was seen by Haley, who shouted:

"Curses on you, are you alive yet? Kill him—kill him!" he cried, savagely.

Dugan and Decker both started to do his bidding, but Henry wheeled rapidly around, and, throwing up the muzzle of his revolver, cried:

"Back—back, I say! One step nearer, and I'll send you into eternity!"

So sudden and unexpected had the whole affair been that the law-breakers had been stupefied by the descent upon them; but now seeming to recover his wits to some extent, Haley shouted:

"To the windows, boys! Jump out and take to your heels, and every man for himself."

They rushed to the windows in the rear, and threw up the sashes, but fell back in dismay when ordered sternly to keep inside, the words seconded by the ominous clickings of revolvers being cocked.

"Now!" cried a voice in front of the house.

Then came the sound of rushing feet, a shock, a crashing, and the door was split into kindling-wood by the log which Ferret's ingenuity had converted into a battering-ram.

A minute later, Ferret and his companions rushed through the demolished door.

Each and every one of the counterfeiters knew how desperate was the strait they were in, and, like cornered beasts of prey, they would fight till the last hope had fled.

Haley, showing his cowardice, got out of the way by descending to the cellar.

Decker, who had been despondent to the last, now aroused himself, and assuming the leadership, shouted:

"Give the hounds a dose—fire!"

They were all armed to the teeth, and had they been cool and collected, and fired straight, Ferret and his backers must have been swept from existence; as it was, none were injured.

"Send it back!" cried the little detective, and five pistol reports rang out simultaneously.

Quickly following the deadly volley came a scream of pain, and Decker fell headlong to the floor, while Dempsey also fell, but unlike Decker, it was in death.

Fiercely and well did the counterfeiters fight, but right and justice could not but come off victorious, and in less than five minutes all opposition had ceased, and in less than five minutes more, all the counterfeiters who had not fallen

beneath the destructive fire of the detectives, were securely bound.

"Ha, Henry, how are you?" asked Ferret, for the first time speaking to the lad, although he had seen him at the moment of his entrance.

"Very well," was the reply, in an off-hand way. "But where is Ferret?"

"Ha—ha—ha!" laughed the little red-headed Irishman. "That's good! Why, boy, I'm Ferret!"

Henry looked closely at the detective, and then shook his head in an unconvinced way.

"You don't believe it, I see."

"Hardly."

Placing his hands to his reddish brown eyes, the detective twirled around on his heel, then facing Henry again, he asked:

"Do you recognize me now?"

In that brief space of time the color of his eyes had changed, and Henry gazed into the depths of a pair of jet black orbs.

Smiling he said:

"I give up; you beat me."

"Now," said Ferret, sharply, "where is Lucy?"

"This way," said Henry, and piloting the detective to the cellar, the girl was soon at liberty.

"Did you catch Haley," she asked.

"That's so!" cried Henry; "where is he?"

A search was instituted, and he was found crouching in the cellar behind a barrel; he was led up stairs, bound and thrown into the wagon, which had meanwhile been driven to the house.

Into this wagon all the living counterfeiters were placed, bound hand and foot, together with all the paraphernalia of their nefarious business and a large lot of spurious money.

Two men were left behind in charge of the house, and then, just before daylight, they started for Fordham, reaching which they took an early train for New York; leaving Lucy at his sister's house, Ferret went to police headquarters and reported the capture, had the uninjured counterfeiters placed in strong cells, while Decker, who was mortally wounded, was taken to the hospital.

CHAPTER XV.

ANNA PURCELL'S STORY.

"Now, Henry," said Ferret, "let's go home."

As that also included seeing Lucy, Henry was not at all loth to go.

Entering the house they found Ferret's sister, Anna Purcell and Lucy, all gathered in the parlor.

"Ah!" said the detective, a smile on his face; "having a quiet gossip all by yourselves."

"We're not gossiping," replied his sister, in a mock indignant tone. "We were listening to this poor girl's story, which is surprising, because Miss Purcell knew her mother."

"I suppose she did," said Ferret, quietly; "since she used to live with Squire Beebe. But now let me introduce my young friend, Mr. Henry Beebe," added the detective, purposely dropping the terminal name of Decker.

At the sound of the name, Anna Purcell started in astonishment and fastened her eyes on Henry's face.

"Did you say Henry Beebe?" she added.

"Yes."

"Is he a son of Squire Beebe?"

"I can't say," honestly replied Ferret. "As near as I could learn, Squire Beebe was never blessed with children."

"Yes, he was," cried Anna. "A son was born to them two days before his wife's death."

"Ah!" and Ferret's eyes opened wide. "Did a man named Decker have anything to do with the child?"

"He did!" she cried, excitedly. "But let me tell you the story of it all, as I promised you I would."

Her tale, condensed somewhat, was as follows:

Her mother had been housekeeper for Squire Beebe at the time of his marriage, she herself being then a girl of fifteen. The squire was a morose, surly man, of a highly suspicious nature and of a very jealous disposition.

Among those who occasionally visited the house was a young man, a cousin of Mrs. Beebe's, of whom the squire was particularly jealous.

Time rolled by, and the squire, led away by his unfounded jealousy, declared that his wife thought more of her cousin than she did of him, and swore that he believed that she had been false to him.

When a son was born, Mrs. Purcell and Anna were the only persons present in addition to the squire, who, after a single look at the babe, gruffly said:

"'Tis none of mine. Here, Anna, take this child from my sight and never let me see it again."

Several hours afterward the squire visited mother and daughter, and forced them to take an oath never to reveal the child's parentage, so that the secret rested between the three.

Two days later Mrs. Beebe died, and none of those who attended the funeral had even the remotest idea of the true state of affairs; and now, quoting Anna's words:

"When I was sixteen there came to work for the squire a man named Joe Decker. He was glib-tongued, nice-looking and very much of a gentleman. To my shame I say it now, his honeyed words sank into my heart and I imagined that I loved him."

"He soon obtained great influence over me and moulded me to suit his will."

"On one occasion the squire missed a sum of money, which, from the attendant circumstances, I knew Joe must have taken, I taxed him with it and he partially admitted the fact, but frightened me into silence when I threatened to expose him."

"Thus days sped by, each succeeding one finding me more deeply ensnared by his wiles."

"When the boy was born Joe obtained an inkling that something was going on, and pressed me to tell him what it was."

"I said 'no,' but well he knew that I could not long resist his importunities, and finally, after exacting an oath from him to keep the secret, I broke my own."

"The next day the child was suddenly missing from the cradle in my mother's room."

"She thought the squire had taken it away, but for certain reasons I believed it to have been stolen by Decker, although I could see no good which he could gain from it."

"A few months later my mother died, and although I was so young I stepped into her position; after this period Decker plied me steadily with his words of love, all of which I foolishly accepted as true; little by little he developed his true character, and finally astounded me with a proposition to rob our employer; my grief at hearing this from the man I loved can be imagined; I recoiled with horror at the idea; then I took the first really false step, for I did not inform the squire of the affair."

"Decker kept harping on the matter until my diseased mind, becoming familiar with it, the horror was lost and I consented to go as far as letting him into the house at night."

"I did so, and Decker disappeared up the stairs, and I saw him enter the squire's room; listening breathlessly, I finally heard a cry for help, followed soon after by high and angry words as of two persons angrily disputing."

Half an hour later Joe descended the stairs, leaped from the window and disappeared, while Ferret to my room trembling with fear.

Scarcely two minutes later the squire appeared, and he looked the picture of wrath.

"Looking sternly at me he said, in a voice hoarse and angry:

"Girl, I could murder you! You betrayed your oath!"

"Joe had played me false.

"I will not tell all the squire said, but maddened by my betraying his secret, he swore to have me arrested and imprisoned for life.

"Almost crazy from his cruel words, I fled when his back was turned for a moment, reached the spot where you found me, and there remained, my life a burden, until I came here," and the poor creature breaking down, commenced crying piteously.

"Don't cry," said the lady of the house, speaking gently and lovingly. "It's all over now."

"Yes," sobbed Anna. "But knowing my story you will turn me away."

"Not if I know it," said Ferret, adding, under his breath, "poor girl, she's more sinned against than sinning."

"If that's the case," said Lucy, gravely, addressing herself to Henry, "we are cousins."

"Yes."

"And you are the heir to everything, and I am a poor girl."

"Say not so," cried Henry, "for what I have will be equally yours when we are man and wife."

"But I'm a wife already," said Lucy, sadly.

"That stands for nothing," was Henry's reply.

"God grant it may be so."

Here Ferret asked:

"Anna, have you ever seen Decker since?"

"Not until the other day," and then she told him of the chance meeting.

"Come, Henry," said the detective, "we must go and see the man."

They found that Decker was in a dying condition, the doctor's verdict being that he could not live more than a couple of hours.

At first the wretched man was inclined to be obstinate, but finally confessed that he had stolen Henry from his cradle with the idea of using him as a lever to extort money from the squire; on the night of robbing the house, the squire had awakened suddenly, and seeing a man in his room, had called for help, and, at the same time recognizing his midnight visitor, threatened the most dire vengeance.

"See here," Decker had said, "if you say anything about this, you'll be sorry for it."

"Why so?"

"Because I'll blab about a certain boy born not many months ago."

This remark opened the angry-toned conversation heard by Anna, which resulted in the squire promising to let Joe go with his ill-gotten gains if he would swear never to divulge the secret he had wormed from Anna.

Joe had given the child in charge of a woman several miles distant, where he called for it on the night of his flight.

Later on it had been given for keeping to Mrs. Quarry, whom he afterwards married and de-

scribed.

The confession was duly written out and attested to by Decker in the presence of witnesses a short time before his eyes were closed in death.

After seeing the closing scene of that wicked, eventful life, Ferret and Henry returned to Twenty-second street.

The next day Henry paid a flying visit to the poor house, where his foster mother was, and removed the sick and suffering woman to more comfortable and pleasant quarters.

She was highly delighted at learning of Henry's history prior to being left in her hands, and gladly gave the desired affidavit, that he was the child placed in her hands by Decker, of whose death she learned without a feeling of regret, for what little love she had ever entertained for him had been annihilated by his cruel treatment.

Ferret spent the day in attending to the cases of the captured counterfeiters, one of whom he began with the terrible crime of murder.

It was Haley.

His face grew livid when informed of the charge, and he gasped:

"Is untrue!"

"Not so!" said Ferret, sternly. "You murdered your uncle!"

"Screaming and moaning, the cowardly assassin groined on the floor of his cell in abject misery.

It will be remembered that on the morning of the murder, a stumpy German, professing to be an undertaker, had gained admission to the house, and when old Betsey had departed to ob-

tain some water he had picked up something from the bed.

It is hardly necessary to say that the German undertaker was none other than our friend, Ferret, the little detective.

The object which he had picked up and concealed was the knife with which the bloody deed had been committed.

In looking at it afterward, it struck Ferret that the knife was newly bought, that it had never been used before.

When he had washed the clotted blood off the blade, he found stamped in the steel, a trademark consisting of an eagle enclosed in a broad circle.

On a venture he visited the hardware stores of Fordham, and asked to be shown some knives; at one of the stores visited he was shown some weapons bearing the eagle and circle.

"Is that your private trademark?" he asked, pointing at the emblem.

"It is," was the reply.

By careful queries he finally wormed out the information that a few days before the shopkeeper had sold just such a knife to a man, whom Ferret concluded from the description was none other than Haley.

This was the only clew he had; the only proof he could offer against Haley would be the fact of the shopkeeper's recognition of the murderer. It was partly for this reason that Ferret so boldly charged Haley with the commission of the crime, thinking that perhaps, hoping for greater mercy, the miserable fellow would confess.

In this he judged rightly, for the coward, unable to brave it out, broke down and told the details of the horrible affair, told that how, fearing that his operations in counterfeiting could not much longer remain undiscovered, he determined to leave the country within the succeeding few months; not wishing to throw away his chance of getting possession of his uncle's property, he kidnapped Lucy, and then murdered the old gentleman.

His only reason for wishing to make Lucy his wife, was that if any question arose he could convert the property into money, and then, leaving her behind, he intended to cross the ocean, and spend the remainder of his life in foreign lands.

Ferret sent for the Fordham hardware dealer, who recognized Haley as soon as he saw him; and when he learned that before him was the murderer of Squire Beebe, he professed himself only too glad to testify in the case.

There was another thing needed attending to—the inquest on Barker's death.

After impanneling the jury, and allowing them to view the body, the coroner had postponed the inquest until the witnesses could be gotten together.

This had heretofore been an impossibility, as Ferret and Henry, when wanted, had both disappeared.

At the inquest, the true story of that blood-curdling scene was brought out, and a wondering, gaping public decided that the world was well rid of so great a villain, and the coroner's jury returned a verdict that:

"The deceased came to his death while in the act of committing murder, by being run over by a train of cars."

The connection of Dechaz with the counterfeiters was traced up, and the scoundrel received a severe but just sentence.

Jack Dugan, Sam Young, Jerry, and the others of the gang, were tried, convicted, and sentenced to twenty years each in prison at hard labor, while the leader of the gang, Haley, was not tried then, but held on the more serious charge against him.

Several weeks slipped by after the conviction of his companions before Haley was placed on trial for his life.

There was but little evidence against him, still not much was necessary, as he pleaded guilty, when called on to answer the charge.

The sentence brought in by the jury was—death by strangulation.

It is not necessary here, nor would it be just the thing to give a description of the closing minutes of his life.

Struggling, kicking, screaming, howling, he was forcibly taken to the gallows, on which, ere many minutes had passed, he had expiated all the crimes of his life.

The Gruggers were captured before this time, and in their cells in that gloomy pile known as the Tombs, they could hear the dying shrieks of their former master.

They, too, had dealt out to them severe but honest justice.

CHAPTER XVI.

"ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL."

Two months have passed since the closing act of this drama.

In a parlor in a house in Twenty-second street a party is gathered, composed of Ferret's sister, the detective himself, (black haired and eyed), Henry Beebe, Lucy Bridges, and Anna Purcell.

"Come, now, Ferret," said Henry, "tell us how you make those wonderful transformations."

"That's a secret," said the detective, with a light laugh, "and an hour ago I would not have told you. But having agreed to go out of the business if Anna would marry me, she has consented to become Mrs. Ferret. So in telling you I will not be giving myself away. Now what puzzles you most?"

"The changing of your eyes."

"It is done in this way," said Ferret, placing his hand in his pocket and taking out a lot of thin shells of glass, whose conformation was exactly like that of an eyeball. "You see these pieces of glass; each one has painted on it an iris, which, as you know, is the outer dark circle of your eyes, which has in reality very little to do with your seeing things, as the sight is located in the pupil; where that would come you see the glass is left white and clear; consequently, when I want a pair of brown eyes, I put on glasses containing a brown iris; blue, grey, or red in the same way. Do you understand?"

"I do," said Henry, lost in admiration of the ingenious arrangement; "and your hair?"

"I haven't any," said Ferret, and true enough, taking hold of the hair on his head, it came off, revealing a cranium as bald as an ostrich egg. "I lost my hair when I had brain fever," he said, in an explanatory way, "and it never came in again. I have my wigs made with the greatest care, and when they are on, it needs sharper eyes than yours to detect the fraud."

"I admit it," said Henry, frankly. "But when you were an Irishman you had a big hole in your teeth as if made by a pipe."

"Another falsity," said Ferret, with a smile, "which you can't understand since my front teeth are natural ones. I fell some years ago and broke one out on the left side of my jaw, the eye tooth and the one back of it, between which a pipe is generally held. I had two false teeth made, with a hole in them. See?"

"Yes."

Well, that is the foundation of all the transformations you have seen me in, and I think I may be pardoned for a little pride in calling myself—*par excellence—the man of many faces!* In fact, that is a *soubriquet* which is frequently applied to me. But come, now, let me question you. Did you settle everything to-day?"

"Yes; to-morrow I can go into undisputed possession of the place at Fordham."

"Glad to hear it! What are your plans for the future, Lucy?"

"I don't know," said Lucy, blushing a rosy red.

"I can tell you!" said Henry, in a mischievous, teasing way. "She's going to Fordham before long to become mistress of the house on the hill."

"Is she going to-morrow?" asked Ferret.

"No."

"Why don't she?" said the now ex-detective.

"If you're going to get married, why not have the little job done right away?"

"I'm willing," promptly said Henry.

"Are you, Lucy?" asked Ferret.

"I—I—don't know," she stammered out.

"I guess you are," cried Ferret, with face beaming with happiness. "I'll go for a parson," starting to his feet.

But ere he reached the door he paused suddenly, and his eyes danced with merriment, as he said:

"We'll have a double wedding. Get ready while I'm gone, Anna," and off he bolted without waiting for an answer.

Anna demurred, but was over-ruled by the others, and when Ferret returned with the minister, she allowed him to take her hand and lead her forward.

The elder couple were married first, and then Henry and Lucy were made man and wife.

The next day the quartette started for Fordham, where they spent a couple of weeks enjoying themselves after their trials and troubles with a zest which only tribulation can give.

And here we will leave them, Henry and Ferret happy in the possession of loving wives, and Lucy and Anna feeling themselves blessed by having such brave and noble-hearted husbands.

[THE END.]

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